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Articles

A DECONSTRUCTION OF THE *MAHABHARATA:* WHEN DRAUPADI WRITES BACK

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Abstract

From a post-colonial and gender perspective I examine R.K. Narayan's *The Mahabharata* (1978), Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *The Palace of Illusions* (2008) and Mahasweta Devi's "Draupadi" (1997), in order to analyze how they have re-written the ancient myth of the *Mahabharata*. To be more precise, I look into the story of Draupadi, one of the most popular female protagonists, who has become an archetype of the Hindu woman. The ultimate goal is to demonstrate by confronting these narrations that Narayan's modern prose responds to the dominant Brahmanical discourse that has built up essentialist models of masculinity and femininity. In contrast, Divakaruni's and Devi's texts go a step further and 1) hark back to a Brahmanical patriarchy that has exercised control over the feminine throughout history; 2) offer a form of counter discourse by interrogating and deconstructing gender; 3) expose with their rebellious voices the limits of the colonizing power and 4) give us a more accurate understanding of women's realities in contemporary India.

Keywords: *Mahabharata*, Draupadi, Narayan, Divakaruni, Devi, gender and post-colonialism.

Resumen

Desde la perspectiva de los estudios postcoloniales y de género, examino *The Mahabharata* (1978) de R.K. Nayaran, *The Palace of Illusions* (2008) de Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni y "Draupadi" (1997) de Mahasweta Devi, con el fin de analizar críticamente cómo estos autores han re-escrito el mito épico antiguo del *Mahabharata*. De forma más precisa me concentro en la historia de Draupadi, uno de los personajes femeninos más famosos, que se ha convertido en un arquetipo de mujer hindú. Al confrontar estas narraciones el objetivo principal es demostrar que la versión moderna en prosa de Narayan responde al discurso dominante Brahmánico que ha construido modelos esencialistas de masculinidad y feminidad. En su lugar, los textos de Divakaruni y de Devi se alejan de esto y 1) desafían y se resisten al patriarcado Brahmánico que ha ejercido control sobre lo femenino a través de la historia; 2) ofrecen un contra-discurso con su interrogación y deconstrucción del género; 3) exponen los límites del poder colonizador con sus voces contestatarias y 4) nos ofrecen un conocimiento más preciso sobre las realidades de la mujer en la India contemporánea.

Palabras clave: *Mahabharata*, Draupadi, Narayan, Divakaruni, Devi, género y postcolonialismo.

1. Introduction and Aims

Men and women in India know that the structure upon which contemporary Indian society rests has its origins in ancient India. All Indians are brought up with a sense of the past that they incorporate through the transmission of popular culture, traditions, mythology and folklore. These particular features constitute an important part of their history and identity. One of these components that has enormously marked Hindu consciousness throughout the ages is the epic myth of the *Mahabharata* which in modern times has been re-written and re-adapted in multifaceted narrations and from many different perspectives. There are Indian English writers like R.K. Narayan with *The Mahabharata* (1978) and Shashi Tharoor with *The Great Indian Novel* (1989) who opt to maintain the imposing tone of the masculine voice of the epic text and its patriarchal context, although their retellings distinctly differ from each other. Whereas Narayan relates a shortened modern prose version of the epic, Tharoor writes a satirical novel that takes the story of the Hindu myth and resets it in the context of the Indian Independence movement and the first decades after 1947. The mythic story is then transformed into a historical depiction of events and political figures. On the other hand, there are also female writers like Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni with her

novel *The Palace of Illusions* (2008) and Mahasweta Devi with her short story, "Draupadi" (1997) —compiled in the collection *Breast Stories* (2010)—, who re-write the Hindu epic from the point of view of Draupadi, the courageous protagonist, in order to bring the politics of domination into relief, as this paper will examine.

This article aims to study, from a post-colonial and gender studies perspective, how different contemporary Indian writers have re-written the ancient epic text, the *Mahabharata*, from very different approaches. Firstly I will analyze the work by one of the pioneers in Indian English writing, R.K. Narayan and his novelized version, *The Mahabharata* (2004, first published in 1978), which contains the key elements that hold together the main story of the ancient text. The purpose is to demonstrate that Narayan's faithful narration and viewpoint of the main events respond to the dominant Brahmanical discourse that has built up essentialist models of masculinity and femininity. To be more precise, I will look into the episode of Draupadi, one of the most popular female protagonists, who has become a model of womanhood. Secondly I will examine Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *The Palace of Illusions* (2008) and Mahasweta Devi's short story "Draupadi" (2010), who re-write the myth of the *Mahabharata* from a female perspective, that of Draupadi, to question Brahmanical discourse and the construction of an archetypal Hindu woman.

The ultimate goal is to demonstrate by confronting these narrations that Divarakuni and Devi go well beyond Nayaran's re-writing of the ancient epic, and take the myth a step further. They 1) respond —or write back— to Brahminical patriarchy that has exercised control over the feminine throughout history; 2) They offer a form of counter discourse by interrogating and deconstructing gender essentialisms and hegemonic power; 3) They expose the limits and absurdities of the dominant discourse with their subversive voices, and 4) They give us a more accurate understanding of woman's realities in contemporary India.

2. The Ancient Myth of the *Mahabharata:* A Patriarchal Text

To begin with and to situate the reader in the context of the epic the *Mahabharata*, which is fundamental to an understanding of the way contemporary writers have re-set and re-written this ancient myth, I will briefly list the major characteristics.[1] the *Mahabharata* is one of the most highly praised texts of Indian culture. It offers multiple readings from different perspectives, which particularly highlight its historical, mythological, philosophical and religious values (Radhakrishnan 1989). It is a long poetic narrative in eighteen volumes, composed in Sanskrit and

written between 300 BCE and 500 CE, although the history of events narrated go back to around 1000 BCE, when the different nomadic tribes, the Aryans, came to India and gradually settled down in the fertile lands of the Ganges and the Yamuna, abandoning their nomadic life style and developing the agricultural skills that were available at that time. The text reflects a very complex society made up of a great diversity of tribes with different customs, and different models of the family. This is not the place to analyse these family models due to the length and complexity of the topic and the fact that it would distract from the matter in hand. However, I would like to point out that throughout history Brahmanic patriarchy has committed itself to the perpetuation of a single archetype of Indian family, the extended or joint family, in detriment of other more varied family units that also appear in the ancient text. The main purpose of prioritizing the extended family as a hegemonic model of family structure, down through the centuries, has been no other than to exercise control over women and the lowest castes through the imposition of a series of laws, traditions, texts, customs and limits (Chakravarti 2007), as I will demonstrate when the key pillars that hold the main story of the *Mahabharata* are analyzed. In fact the major plot can easily be summarized for it simply deals with the fratricidal struggle between members of the same family: on the one hand are the Kauravas, also called the one hundred sons of the old blind king, Dhritarastra; and on the other hand we have their cousins, the five Pandava brothers. Both parties, Kauravas and Pandavas, face each other in an inevitable battle for the succession to the throne and the control of the kingdom and the subjects.

Philosophically, we can read the *Mahabharata* as a profound manifestation that narrates the eternal story of mankind, the constant struggle for power and dominance, in which Lord Krishna also appears in order to save human souls. Nevertheless, if we examine the *Mahabharata* from the point of view of gender studies it is clear that, despite its magnificence in religious, philosophical, historical and literary values, the *Mahabharata* is, par excellence, a patriarchal story. Moreover, it is composed in that period of history that has left behind the age of matriarchal cultures,[2] metals like tin, bronze and iron have been discovered, agriculture has appeared and starts flourishing and as a result the land becomes very valuable and needs more and more labour. It was then that the Aryans abandoned their nomadism and settled down in the fertile lands of the Ganges and the Yamuna. All these historical events led to the struggle for the control of the land, the exercise of power and the subjection of some beings over others, as Simone de Beauvoir shows in *The Second Sex* (1949), explaining the origins of patriarchal societies and how they developed. Private property was created at that time, Beauvoir contends in the third chapter, and with it came the exploitation of people by their fellow human beings. Around this time too a dense literature of

myths emerged where the protagonists are the male heroes and the women passively support the men warriors, as in the first chapter of Narayan's *The Mahabharata* where Kunthi and Madri, mothers of the five Pandava brothers, invoke the gods and pray to get pregnant by the divine seed and bear boys who will become good warriors and fight and defend the land. It is noteworthy that the *Mahabharata* prioritizes high caste families such as the warriors ('ksatriya'), in which each member occupies a particular position in the family hierarchy of the extended family and must resolve the moral dilemmas and conflicts according to his/her place (Chakravarti 2007).

2.1. Draupadi: The Sublimation of Suffering

I would now like to focus on Draupadi, a figure that has built a very specific image of womanhood, that of the suffering and obedient Hindu woman, which has deeply conditioned popular consciousness. Paradoxically, the *Mahabharata* narrates that Draupadi has defied the local law and customs by marrying the five Pandavas, a very reprehensible conduct and in no way permissible in those days, as described in chapter four "Bride for Five" (Narayan 2004). But what are the main facts of the story that lead Draupadi to challenge the established norms of the patriarchal Aryan-Hindu society? And why has she been considered a prototype of the Hindu woman?

In Narayan's *The Mahabharata* we are told that Draupadi is a beautiful and intelligent young princess who lives in the kingdom of Panchala. When the time comes her father, the king, announces her 'swayamvara', which is a competition where the warrior that wins marries the princess. The test is prepared and consists of testing the warrior's skill in the use of a heavy bow and arrows. Arjuna, one of the five Pandava brothers, is the only one capable of meeting this challenge and Draupadi proclaims him the winner and accepts him as her husband. After the victory, the Pandavas lead Draupadi to their home in the forest where they live with their mother Kunthi. She does not notice who is with them and automatically tells Arjuna to share his trophy with his brothers. When Kunthi discovers her mistake, she does not retract her order and allows Draupadi to be the wife of the five Pandavas.

The story tells us that after some time the enemy, the Kauravas, in their eagerness to seize the throne and get control of the kingdom of Bharata,[3] have started to conspire against the Pandavas. The Kauravas invite them to play dice, a very popular game in those days, because they know that Yudhisthira, the eldest brother, is fond of the game and it will be easy to play a trick on him: "Yudhisthira slipped into a gambler's frenzy, blind to consequences, his vision blurred to all but the ivory-white dice and the chequered board. He forgot who he was, where he was,

who else was there and what was right or wrong" (Narayan 2004: 56). Having lost his material possessions he stakes his brothers and loses them. Then he stakes himself and loses again. Finally he also puts Draupadi up as a bet and loses his wife too. Draupadi is horrified to hear this and refuses to go to court. She also tells them that she is having her monthly period and not appropriately dressed to appear before the royal assembly of men but her objections are ineffectual. Although she is clothed in a simple garment one of the Kauravas grabs her hair and forcefully pulls her in. There they humiliate her, arguing that a woman with five husbands is a whore. To punish her for breaking the laws of honour, she is ordered to be disrobed, which is one of the most humiliating expressions of sexual harassment a Hindu woman can suffer.[4] Draupadi's husbands remain passive so she prays to her God, Krishna, to protect her. A miracle happens when one of the Kauravas starts unwinding yards and yards of her sari and it becomes endless. At this point everybody looks on in awe and eventually Draupadi begs the old blind king of the Kauravas, Dhritarastra, to release her five husbands. The king satisfies her desire and the Pandavas and Draupadi return to their house in the forest. This is the story about Draupadi that the majority of Indians would tell today; an emblematic narration that has been transmitted from generation to generation (Sharma 2007). My purpose is to analyze how this story has been interpreted and how it has influenced and conditioned popular thinking in contemporary India.

Different critics and scholars such as Gayatri C. Spivak in *In Other Worlds* (1987) argue that Draupadi is a courageous woman who bravely breaks the strict gender barriers by defying the law and custom of her time: she can be proud —if she wishes— of having sexual relations with her five husbands. However, patriarchal cultural patterns, constructed by Brahmanical ideology, are so integrated into the minds of the majority of Hindus that far from seeing Draupadi as an assertive woman, it is the constant humiliation she receives that is praised; in other words, instead of becoming a heroine her victimhood is highlighted. In this way the patriarchal hegemonic gaze makes Draupadi an extraordinary woman for the humiliation and mockery she accepts. Thus Draupadi represents an extraordinary model of the sublimation of suffering and oppression that for a large part of Hindu popular consciousness needs to be victorious. Other specific examples of this sublimation would be the following: first, Draupadi is a princess but she is treated as an ordinary woman because she has to undergo the ritual of the 'swayamvara' in which she is the trophy; second, the five Pandavas have to share Draupadi and what worries her is whether she will be able to serve them well; third, she is humiliated and treated like a prostitute for violating the moral laws and social conventions, punishments which her husbands do not have to undergo, nor are they condemned to be naked in public; and fourth, even the mother, Kunthi, has subtly internalized these fixed gender norms that sustain these extended high caste

families and it is very difficult for her to take her word back; she does nothing to save Draupadi from becoming the sex object of her five husbands and their faithful servant. It has to be underlined then that Brahmanic ideology has always praised this traditional image of womanhood in which humiliation becomes a heroic pattern. The constant repetition of this myth and the exaltation of Draupadi in particular, a woman who endures suffering, has given rise to the construction of fixed cultural binaries of femininity and also of masculinity; of brave male warriors and suffering women.

3. When Draupadi Writes Back

The grandeur of the literary art allows us to analyze, re-create and re-tell stories from different perspectives that deconstruct hegemonic positions. Gayatri Spivak (1987) and Uma Chakravarti (2003 and 2007) fight against the patriarchal discourse of the *Mahabharata*, also in contemporary narrations like Narayan's, which due to Brahmanic influence have become rigorous exponents of orthodoxy and authenticity of Hindu culture. In addition, other contemporary writers like Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni and Mahasweta Devi re-write the *Mahabharata* from the perspective of Draupadi, putting the emphasis on 'the feminine', stressing sensitivity and responding to the hegemonic power of Brahmanism, which through the official history of colonization has attributed to the feminine a considerable degree of passivity and weakness.

3.1. Questioning of the *Mahabharata:* Chitra B. Divakaruni's Contemporary Re-Telling

In *The Palace of Illusions* (2008) Divakaruni gives voice to the princess of Panchali, another name that is also used for Draupadi, who tells her own story and writes back to patriarchy. The novel of Divakaruni more faithfully represents an example of today's modern woman in India, whose reality is not easy but who takes control of her own life and constantly struggles against barbaric traditions, selfish interests, lack of ethics and local and global conflicts. In her role of storyteller, Divakaruni's Draupadi exercises the unremitting function of questioning every single word that sustains patriarchal power. From the very first page Draupadi carries out her incisive work, interrogating the practices and values of masculine society. She questions every character that appears and, for example, speaks openly of her sexual desires, confessing that although she is a good wife she does not love her husbands. The narration of her story throws light on those dark areas of a woman who has to live in a masculine world. Let us consider some of the many examples in the novel that show the nonstop action of the protagonist in questioning everything.

Right at the start Draupadi complains about her name; how is it possible —she asks us— that her brother was given a name that means 'destroyer of the enemy' and she was just called 'the daughter of Drupad'?: "Couldn't my father have come up with something a little less egoistic? Something more suited to a girl who was supposed to change history?" (Divakaruni 2008: 5). We also find at the beginning of the narration that according to the prophecy proclaimed by the priests at her birth the daughter of Drupad is destined to change the course of history. When hearing this news, Draupadi is surprised and questions whether this is possible because her name, the daughter of, already indicates a subordinate position and she asks whether she has been given the corresponding attributes that correspond to a heroine who is destined to intervene in the process of history such as courage, perseverance and an iron will. It seems that the author is pointing to the fact that her heroine, Draupadi, will be very different from Narayan's and also from the one in the ancient epic, because she will be the maker of her own life, responsible for conducting it, instead of silently following the norms dictated by others. Moreover, her actions will have repercussions in the twists and turns of her story and will transform the dark reality around her. We can deduce that Divakaruni's heroine's main purpose is to deconstruct the ideal of passivity and female submission and offer a stark contrast to the patriarchal 'Mahabharatas'. At the same time her figure shows a different model of woman, one who is an active agent, eager to shape her own life, which is more in consonance with contemporary times and current realities. With this same purpose Draupadi continues questioning the duty that tradition has assigned to her, a woman born into a high-caste:

> A kshatriya woman's highest purpose in life is to support the warriors in her life: her father, brother, husband, and sons […]
> "And who decided that a woman's highest purpose was to support men?" (2008: 26)

Draupadi belongs to the warriors' caste but she does not understand why men are always battling. She even considers that if they want to be crowned with glory there are other ways, which she intends to teach them if they like. Consequently, we find ourselves before a Draupadi who embodies very noble human values; a heroine that truly embraces the feminine, in other words, a woman whose aim is to create harmony and peace and teach people to do the same by her example, instead of adopting an essentialist masculine pattern that would imply violence, competition, possession, categorization, subjugation or colonization of the other.[5] A few pages later she expresses this idea: "'The kings are always fighting', she said. 'All they want is more land, more power. They tax the common people to starvation and force them to fight in their armies'" (Divakaruni 2008: 65).

Another example in which Draupadi vindicates a dignified feminine space has to do with the relationship established with her five husbands. In the patriarchal text she must spend one year with each one of them and every time she is passed into the hands of the next husband she is granted the gift of virginity. The heroine of Divakaruni interrogates this absurd arrangement because she feels like a jug of drink passing from hand to hand. She ironically questions the gift of her virginity and affirms that this particular present granted to women only seems to benefit men.

Little by little Draupadi learns that her husbands do not love her all that much: "there were other things they love more. Their notions of honor, of loyalty toward each other, of reputation were more important to them than my suffering" (Divakaruni 2008: 195). As she gradually discovers the subtle shades of dominant masculine power through her husbands and the men around her, it is not surprising that when Yudhisthira loses the palace playing dice, Draupadi shouts angrily in front of them: "'My palace?' I interrupted furious. 'He had no right!'" (190). Naturally, Draupadi gets irritated and complains because *her* palace, the palace that gives the title to the novel, *The Palace of Illusions*, is a metaphor of her life, also of the lives of many women who have illusions. It symbolizes a woman's space, the room of one's own as Virginia Woolf would put it; a feminine space that continually has to be re-created and re-appropriated in order not to be colonized and dismantled in the battle against oppressive masculinity. "The laws of men would not save me" (191), Draupadi declares when they are about to strip off her sari. Then she asks her God, Krishna, for some help and adds: "Let them stare at my nakedness, I thought. Why should I care? They and not I should be ashamed for shattering the bounds of decency" (193).

This concept of decency to which Divakaruni's Draupadi alludes would correspond to the paradigm of ethics, tremendously necessary in today's world as Metka Zupančič argues:

> In today's world ruled by self-absorbed individuals, with egotistic preoccupations that foster divisions, conflicts and separations […] Divakaruni's prose writings, especially some of the most recent ones, carry profound ethical values and the promise of a world that we could all build together, with literature as an efficient and convincing tool for collective transformation based on mutual understanding and love as a binding force. (2013: 107)

Bearing in mind that the *Mahabharata* tells the story of the beginnings of mankind, in these rapidly changing times the perspective of women is also quintessential and has to be represented fairly in local and global contexts where ethics should not be left out.

Therefore we can deduce that Divakaruni's novel intertwines the historical facts of a given period, along with magic and myth, while patriarchal values like violence,

aggressive competitiveness and the domination and submission of the feminine are deconstructed. An ancient story transmitted from generation to generation for thousands of years is re-written and narrated today by a woman who offers a more precise depiction of the reality of contemporary India, where human conflicts are seen in a new light and essentialist patterns of gender are also deconstructed. By adopting a narrative style of constant interrogation fruitful results are obtained: 1) Brahmanic patriarchal structures are challenged and deconstructed; 2) women are rescued from the shackles of a traditional oppressive culture; 3) the pattern of a submissive and subservient woman is undone; and 4) an alternative model of the feminine is shown. There is no doubt that Divakaruni's contemporary narration of the ancient myth, from the perspective of the princess of Panchali, or Draupadi, implies a courageous act of rebellion against Brahmanic tradition and the traditionalist Hindu mindset that advocates a static and unchanging Indian culture. Divakaruni's writing-back emphasizes the existence of other realities of women and shows how myths can be adapted to represent the realities of the times.

3.2. Dopdi or the Power of an 'Adivasi' Woman

Another postcolonial writer who has re-written the story of Draupadi is Mahasweta Devi with her short story, "Draupadi" (2010).[6] Devi is a Bengali writer whose greatest concern and source of inspiration have always been the indigenous tribal populations of India or the adivasi,[7] who have inhabited India since ancient times. Owing to (neo)colonization the adivasi people have always been in a very vulnerable position, which has encouraged Devi to portray the crude realities of their existence, especially of women. This is her description: "I find my people still groaning under hunger, landlessness, indebtedness, and bonded labour. An anger, luminous, burning and passionate, directed against a system that has failed to liberate my people from their horrible constraints, is the only source of inspiration for all my writing" (Goel 2007: 203).

"Draupadi" is a good example of the kind of social literature that Devi writes. Moreover we can read it in parallel with Narayan's patriarchal text. The story is composed of three parts. In the first one the protagonist, Draupadi, is introduced to the reader with the name of Dopdi, which is the tribalized form. Dopdi and her husband Dulna are wanted by the police because they have participated in a peasant's revolt which resulted in the death of a landowner. They are also accused of being the ringleaders of a group of ideologically-driven members of the tribe and intellectuals who have attacked various police headquarters and have killed various landowners, money-lenders and bureaucrats among others. Then Senanayak is introduced, the army officer who is responsible for putting down the revolts. Soon Dulna dies and the soldiers use his body as bait to capture Dopdi,

but she does not fall into the trap and takes to the forest by way of escape. This first part concludes with an atmosphere of terror: the powerful of the place are terrified of being attacked by the rebels.

The second part focuses on the unceasing search for Dopdi; the narration underlines the description of her dilapidated appearance, badly undernourished: "with some rice knotted into her belt […] as she walked, she picked out and killed the lice in her hair" (Devi 2010: 27). It also highlights her psychological state, she is tormented by what can happen to her if the soldiers capture her: "When they *kounter* you, your hands are tied behind you. All your bones are crushed, your sex is a terrible wound" (29, emphasis in original). We discover at this point what was the cause of the uprising by the adivasis, the peasants and certain intellectuals that has unleashed such a wave of violence: one of the landowners —the one assassinated— built several wells on his property, giving rise to a terrible drought in the region. This strategy seems to be very commonly used by the wealthy and the landowners to increase their rice production, resulting in the impoverishment of the peasants. Without basic resources the peasantry will feel obliged to borrow food or money from the masters in this vicious circle of a feudal system: "The quarrel began there. In the drought, human patience catches easily […] Dulna had said, I'll have the first blow, brothers. My great-grandfather took a bit of paddy from him, and I still give him free labour to repay that debt" (2010: 30). Finally, the soldiers manage to hunt down Dopdi, who looks weak but still has enough energy and pride to launch a cry to heaven in favour of her adivasi people.

The third part of the story creates more intense feelings because it deals with the humiliation, torture and pain of the protagonist. Senanayak orders his soldiers to "do the needful" (Devi 2010: 35) and soon the rape starts: "Indeed, she's made up right. Her breasts are bitten raw, the nipples torn. How many? Four-five-six-seven —then Draupadi had passed out" (35). Her degradation is palpable but in the last scene the writer surprises us giving a relevant twist to the whole narration, as will be seen later.

Now that we know the story we can argue that the title "Draupadi", as well as the name of the main protagonist, is not a mere coincidence. On the contrary, Devi's aim is to re-write this chapter of the *Mahabharata* from a feminine perspective. In her introduction to *Breast Stories* (2010) Gayatri Spivak argues that "the ancient Draupadi is perhaps the most celebrated heroine of the Indian epic *Mahabharata*. The *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana* are the cultural credentials of the so-called Aryan civilization of India" (in Devi 2010: 10) and have marked Indian patriarchal culture until today.

In Devi's short story the name of the protagonist appears in two versions: the form 'Draupadi' is used for the title and in the third part of the story that takes place in

Senanayak's space. The other version, 'Dopdi', corresponds to a more tribalized use of the name and is employed in the first and second part, within a more rural and natural context where she lives. We know that to name means to identify so in the tribalized version of her name the writer is pointing to Dopdi's origins; in other words, Devi wants to highlight the fact that she is an adivasi woman and consequently she will be exposed to a double humiliation. She does not mention her particular tribal group, although we can guess she is a Santal because they are the largest tribe in West Bengal. However, the writer's objective is not to underline Dopdi's ethnic belonging but rather to remind us of a piece of history, often forgotten, and emphasize the fact that the adivasis were already living all over India before the arrival of the Aryans around 2000 BCE. The Aryans crossed the Hindu Kush mountain range and gradually moved towards the fertile plains of the Ganges and the Yamuna. On their way they occupied vast territories, fought against their inhabitants, the adivasis, in long wars until the latter were killed or defeated (Keay 2000). One of these terrible, long wars is narrated in the myth of the *Mahabharata* that glorifies the male heroes of the Aryan race. We then understand that with "Draupadi" Mahasweta Devi intends to shed some light on a historical episode and emphasize the subordinate position of the adivasi peoples, who were colonized and subjected by the Aryan hegemony. The Aryan colonizers introduced their Sanskrit language, their Vedic religious texts, their deities, their legal treatises like the *Laws of Manu*, their epics, the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana*,[8] and a whole series of moral values, cultural and social structures —like caste or the extended family— that have provided India with "an unprecedented cultural integrity and an enviably high degree of civilization" (Keay 2000: 22). And centuries later, Keay argues

> out of the west came the British. No less fair, no less manly and no less confident of their superiority, they were the new-Aryans, galvanising a naturally lax people into endeavour and industry, showering them with the incomparable benefits of a higher civilization and a humane religion, and ushering in a new and golden age. Or so some liked to think. (2000: 22)

Likewise, the British also colonized India, subjected the population, imposed their culture and as a result Indians, in general, and also the most vulnerable populations like the adivasis, had to defend themselves from a new invader.

Mahasweta Devi's story metaphorically refers to this continuous colonization that has occurred throughout history in which her adivasi people[9] have been oppressed. She puts the emphasis on the abuse of power and above all on the exercise of resistance. She highlights adivasi resistance to all kinds of colonizers, the Aryans, the English and also Senanayak, the police officer, who symbolizes the dominant power in contemporary India. With thorough conviction Devi remarks in

"Draupadi": "He is Prospero as well" (2010: 23), and she directs us to *The Tempest* by Shakespeare, where the colonizer, Prospero, has conquered Caliban's island and has made him his slave. In *Post-Colonial Transformation* (2001) Bill Ashcroft writes: "Prospero and Caliban and Prospero and Miranda can be seen to provide endlessly adaptable models for the relationship between empire and settlers, or between colonizers and indigenous inhabitants" (2001: 33). In addition, Devi stresses the significance of his name, 'Senanayak', which is not really his own but a common one meaning "chief of police", probably to underline what Spivak comments: "This may be a critique of the man's apparently self-adequate identity" (in Devi 2010: 16).

Undoubtedly Senanayak represents the official dominant power that serves and obeys the land owners who govern and control the production of the land; the same people who corrupt the laws leaving the region without water —as the story narrates— because they know that they will profit from it and be able to control the peasantry. The control of the land at the time of the ancient myth of The *Mahabharata* and also in contemporary days appears to be fundamental and Mahasweta Devi with "Drapadi" is connecting both texts and re-writing the realities of the adivasis in general, and the women in particular, who continue struggling to maintain their rights. Vandana Shiva in *Staying Alive: Women, Ecology and Development* (1989) demonstrates that today some multinational companies have signed agreements with corrupt local Indian governments to extract water in unlimited amounts and non-sustainable ways, leaving dry the water resources of the poorest communities, mostly adivasi communities. Assertive adivasi women like Dopdi denounce these violations and mobilize in defence of their own land (Chakrabarty 2015).

As a result we learn that "Draupadi", Devi's short story, interrelates different historical episodes of colonization, the Aryans vs. the adivasis; the British vs. the Indians; Senanayak vs. Dopdi, in a narrative scenario that transcends the boundaries of time and space. It is noteworthy that in the cultural encounter between the colonizer and the colonized, the most vulnerable, whether adivasis, Indians or Dopdi, have always given expression to their resistance. Then what does it mean to resist? What does resistance imply, we may ask as Bill Ashcroft does in *Post-Colonial Transformation* (2001). Ultimately, there are many ways of exercising resistance and the term itself adapts to many circumstances, if we consider that to resist is a mode of self-defence against an invader, a simple way of saying "no". Among the myriad expressions for offering resistance, Ashcroft states that "the subtle and sometimes even unspoken forms of social and cultural resistance have been much more common [… They] are most interesting because they are most difficult for imperial powers to combat" (2001: 20). This is what

happens in the third part of "Draupadi", when the soldiers apprehend her. "Do the needful" (Devi 2010: 35), Senanayak orders, and they begin to rape her, as an example of punishment designed to reaffirm their authority. Draupadi is all covered in blood and has lost all hope: "Perhaps they have abandoned her. For the foxes to devour. But she hears the scrape of feet […] Draupadi closes her eyes. She doesn't have to wait long. Again the process of making her begins. Goes on" (2010: 35). She is suffering the highest degradation a woman can bear and she does not invoke heavenly powers or the help of the gods, as the Draupadi in Narayan's narration does, accurately following the ancient myth. To save her reputation and honour in these patriarchal texts God Krishna appears and protects Draupadi's womanhood, miraculously giving her a sari with layers and layers of cloth that the enemy cannot unwrap. By contrast, Devi's Draupadi expresses her resistance to Senanayak and the colonizing power he represents, and tears off her bloody piece of cloth, then she bravely stands before the chief officer, all naked:

> You asked them to make me up, don't you want to see how they made me?
> Where are her clothes?
> Won't put them on, Sir. Tearing them. […]
> What's the use of clothes? […] There isn't a man here that I should be ashamed […]
> Come on, *kounter* me —come on—, *kounter* me—? (2010: 36-37, emphasis in original)

Faced with such a challenge, Senanayak is puzzled because he has possibly underestimated the power of a woman, an adivasi woman, who is alone and in such circumstances. Draupadi uses the term 'kounter' to allude to the ruthless and aberrant sexual encounter, the rape itself, and to her ultimate death. But with the appropriation of this same sexual discourse, using her body as a weapon, Draupadi emerges from her misery —as a colonized object— and transforms herself into a powerful subject capable of infusing fear into Senanayak, "for the first time Senanayak is afraid to stand before an unarmed *target*, terribly afraid" (37, emphasis in original), a marvellous narrative twist with which the author concludes the story and strikes a blow against the dominant power.

4. Conclusion

To conclude this paper I would like to stress that both Mahasweta Devi and Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni fabulously[10] re-write the representation of the feminine, of Draupadi, and interrogate not only the myth of the ancient epic text, but also all the contemporary patriarchal narrations of the *Mahabharata* such as Narayan's. With their respective idiosyncrasies and narratives, the writers

respond to Brahmanic tyranny and show us images of women and of the feminine, which are more in consonance with the diversity of India's contemporary realities. Their re-writing and also their writing back manage to 1) destabilize Brahmanical patriarchy; 2) subvert the models of representation of the dominant discourse with respect to the colonized subject and 3) stress —as Spivak (1987) puts it— that the subordinate cannot speak within the hegemonic discourse, which does not mean that s/he has no power or voice, as this paper has demonstrated. Within his/her otherness the colonized/subordinate/subaltern has constantly exercised and still exercises resistance to the dominant power. Last but not least I would like to underline that with their elegantly subversive narrations, Devi and Divakaruni recreate a very significant part of the myth of the *Mahabharata*, the chapter focused on the figure of Draupadi, and demonstrate that re-writing stories like this not only consists of adding one more voice or a different version or a radical position to the literary complexity, but also of taking the pulse of the same patriarchal colonizing discourse and displaying its limits and absurdities.

Notes

[1] See also the English film adaptation of the *Mahabharata*, directed by Peter Brook in 1989, which is a TV mini-series of about 6 hours. In 1985 his original nine-hour long stage play of the *Mahabharata* toured around the world.

[2] See for example the myth of the Devi-Mahatmya narrated in *Encountering the Goddess* by Thomas B. Coburn (1992), which tells the story of Devi, the Great Divinity that reigns in the cosmos, who is worshipped by the first tribal populations of India that lived here before the arrival of the Aryans and are displaced by them.

[3] 'Bharata' in Sanskrit means India; and 'Maha' great. Consequently 'Mahabharata' means great India. However it is important to note that the context centres around the plains of the Ganges and Yamuna, that is to say, in today's India it corresponds to the area around Delhi and the state of Haryana. In fact the story mentions that the great battle between the Kauravas and the five Pandavas takes place in Kurushetra, which has become a sacred city in the state of Haryana.

[4] Being forced to walk naked is a severe punishment in India, used even today. There are many examples in the press like, "India Probes Tribal Woman Forced to Walk Naked" by Subir Bhaumik (2010), at <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-south-asia-10938729>. See also "Paraded Naked News" (2016) by the NDTV, which offers a compilation of news from 2009 to 2016 on this kind of major punishment, at <http://www.ndtv.com/topic/paraded-naked/news>.

[5] I would like to remind the reader that gender is a construction so when we refer to 'masculinity' we are not directly referring to men as both male and female sexes can construct feminine or masculine attributes/values. Traditionalist and essentialist binary pairs of masculinity and femininity or man and woman do not consider gender a cultural construction. See Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble* (1990).

[6] Devi's "Draupadi" is introduced by Gayatri C. Spivak in the collection *Breast Stories* (2010, first published 1997).

[7] The term 'adivasi' literally refers to 'the first settlers of India'. '*Adi*' means first and '*vasi*' means people. For more information see for example *Orissa, templos y tribus* (2008) by Ana García-Arroyo.

[8] With regard to the *Ramayana,* I am referring to the text by Valmiki and also by Tulsi Das, the two canonical versions, which sing the glories of the masculine heroes. In this way my intention is to differentiate them from the other multiple versions of 'Ramayanas' in regional or local languages that have not been translated into English and are not standardized. They are known as the 'other Ramayanas' or 'Sitayanas', because they narrate the story from the position of the female protagonist, Sita. Brahmanical patriarchy does not accept these other 'Ramayanas'. See: *Historia de las mujeres de la India* (2009) by Ana García-Arroyo. See also Nabaneeta Dev Sen's "Candravati Ramayana: Feminizing the Rama-Tale" (2000).

[9] For more details about how the English carried out their colonial invasions in the adivasi area of West Bengal and Orissa, and how these populations resisted them and how they continue resisting hegemonic power, see the article "Mujer adivasi: clama la memoria" by Ana García-Arroyo (2017).

[10] Here I embrace both meanings of the word 'fabulously': 1) extremely pleasing and successful, and 2) "of the nature of a fable or myth", which is very appropriate here as both writers re-write the myth and also contest it.

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"THIS IS A BUSINESS TRANSACTION, FUNDAMENTALLY": SURROGATE MOTHERHOOD IN MEERA SYAL'S *THE HOUSE OF HIDDEN MOTHERS*[1]

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Abstract

Meera Syal's latest novel, *The House of Hidden Mothers* (2015), depicts the current practice of international surrogacy and raises questions about this form of reproduction which commodifies babies and constructs poor women's bodies in India and elsewhere as sites of reproductive exploitation. Nonetheless, Syal's novel challenges an initial reading of Indian surrogate mothers as mere passive victims of western capitalist demands and depicts a surrogate mother, Mala, who constantly subverts her position as a disempowered, 'third world' woman. I shall argue that the novel bridges the discursive western-constructed gap between 'poor and disempowered' Indian women and 'rich and empowered' British ones explicitly through its ending, but also implicitly by engaging with gender concerns related to the perception, (re)presentation and exploitation of women's bodies in the United Kingdom and India alike.

Keywords: *The House of Hidden Mothers*, Meera Syal, surrogacy, reproductive outsourcing, Asian-British Literature.

Resumen

La última novela de Meera Syal, *The House of Hidden Mothers* (2015), se centra en la práctica de la gestación subrogada internacional y plantea cuestiones sobre esta

forma de reproducción por la que los bebés se convierten en artículos de cambio y a través de la que los cuerpos de mujeres pobres en la India y otros países se tornan en espacios de explotación reproductiva. No obstante, la novela de Syal pone en entredicho una única lectura de las madres subrogadas como meras víctimas de las demandas capitalistas occidentales y presenta a una mujer, Mala, que continuamente subvierte su posición de mujer desempoderada del 'Tercer Mundo'. Este artículo propone que la novela de Syal salva las distancias que discursivamente se construyen entre las 'mujeres pobres y desempoderadas' en la India y las 'mujeres empoderadas y ricas' de occidente de manera explícita al final de la novela pero también implícitamente a lo largo de la misma al abordar cuestiones de género relativas a la percepción, (re)presentación y explotación de los cuerpos de las mujeres tanto en la India como en el Reino Unido.

Palabras Clave: *The House of Hidden Mothers*, Meera Syal, maternidad subrogada, externalización reproductiva, literatura británica asiática.

Meera Syal's latest novel, *The House of Hidden Mothers* (2015), approaches the controversial theme of international surrogacy through the experiences of an Asian-British couple, Shyama and Todd, who embark on the journey of motherhood/parenthood through surrogacy in India. The novel explores a breadth of topics —surrogacy, corruption, family conflicts, gender oppression and ageing processes, among others— and this wide thematic scope has brought about conflicting literary reviews. Some literary critics admire Syal's ability "to pull it off with panache" (Elkin 2015) and the novel has been praised as "a delicately written, profound study of the female condition in the rich world and the poor" (Alibhai-Brown 2015), while others consider it "a cautionary tale about inter-racial surrogacy and late parenthood" (Daftuar 2015) which "struggles to weave its narrative and thematic strands with sufficient dexterity into the rich tapestry the story yearns to be" (Beckerman 2015). Regardless of the narrative successes or failures in terms of plot and structure and its fairytale-like ending in which Mala, the surrogate mother, succeeds in keeping the baby and winning Todd's heart, *The House of Hidden Mothers* undeniably approaches a present-day issue, surrogacy, both in India and the United Kingdom. Moreover, Syal's novel examines it from various points of view: from the lived experience of the surrogate mother to that of the intended parents, involving as it does the ethical and commercial justification of the doctor involved in the procedure and the reactions of close family members and friends.

Meera Syal made a name for herself as an actress and comedian in the popular TV programs *Goodness*, *Gracious Me* or *The Kumars at No 42*. The former was initially aired on BBC radio 4 and later broadcast on BBC 2 from 1998 until 2001 (with a special show televised in 2015 as part of the BBC's 50th Anniversary), and defined

as "the ground-breaking British-Asian comedy show" (Hogan 2014) which was "a cathartic way of dealing with racism" (Abbasi 2015). The latter has been described as "an indirect spin-off from *Goodness, Gracious Me* devised by its star Sanjeev Bhaskar, along with his partner Meera Syal and executive producer Anil Gupta, as a way of adding life to the increasingly tired chat-show by placing it in the heart of a family sitcom" ("The Kumars at No 42" 2014). *Anita and Me*, published in 1996, was Syal's debut novel. Set in the early 1970s, it centers on the young Meena as she grows up in a fictional ex-mining village in the north of England; it won a Betty Trask Award and was shortlisted for the Guardian Fiction Prize. This novel was followed, three years later, by *Life Isn't All Ha Ha Hee Hee*; it concerns the lives of three young women, Chila, Sunita and Tania, daughters of Punjabi immigrants whose rebellious youth "threatens to undermine the carefully preserved Indian culture their parents had ironically sacrificed, and then attempted to rebuild in order to make a better life for their children" (Campbell-Hall 2009: 209). The novel thus follows these three young women's growing process from being defiant teenagers, embarrassed by their parents and their heritage, to becoming adults who accept their roots and cultural legacy. According to James Procter, "[Syal's] work in fiction and on screen is exemplary for the way in which it uses humour to both challenge the limits of political correctness and to contribute to a politicised understanding of British Asian culture" (2002). Likewise, in *The House of Hidden Mothers* Syal makes use of a humorous tone and a fairytale-like style to approach a multi-edged and current matter in an insightful and thought-provoking way. In this paper, I shall argue that Syal's novel not only raises questions about the ethics behind reproductive outsourcing but also challenges an overly simplistic interpretation of the depiction of Indian surrogate mothers as passive victims of western capitalist demands. Moreover, I shall state that the novel addresses topics related to gender oppression such as ageing and sexual abuse suffered by women both in the United Kingdom and in India. These issues contribute to the problematization of female liberation and gender equality rights in the United Kingdom relative to India.

Approaching Surrogacy: India and the UK

The House of Hidden Mothers engages with a legally and socially sensitive topic both in the UK and India. According to statistics given by MP Jessica Lee in a Westminster Hall debate there are "an estimated 1,000-2,000 children born to surrogates for UK-based IPs *per year*, with 'up to 95%' of these being born overseas" (Horsey et al. 2015: 13, emphasis in original). This kind of surrogacy is known as 'international' or 'cross-border' surrogacy, though in this paper I shall

refer to this as reproductive outsourcing. The term 'reproductive outsourcing' has been used by Jones and Keith in the context of medical tourism to refer to "a special form of medical tourism in which pregnancy is initiated in one location, and where parturition typically occurs at another, typically the home region of the patient" (2006: 252). This definition circumscribes outsourcing to one aspect of the fertility treatment undertaken by the couple. Nonetheless, in this paper I would like to expand the usage of this term and apply it to international surrogacy —as the outsourcing of overseas wombs— in order to emphasize the connections between this form of reproduction and economic globalization.

Through surrogacy, women agree to become pregnant, gestate a fetus "genetically unrelated to the surrogate" (Robinson 1994: 205) and to then "relinquish their parental rights and responsibilities" (Robinson 1994: 205) at birth and recognize the couple who commissions the pregnancy as the legal parents. Surrogacy is carried out through a fertilized egg being implanted into the womb of a surrogate mother. The sperm usually derives from the intended father and the ovum comes from a donor in order to minimize the complex legal implications and "redefine the concept, mother, and subsequently decrease the saliency of the gestational role in that definition, thus altering the mother-fetus relationship" (Robinson 1994: 205). Surrogacy, therefore, attempts to establish a clear-cut distinction between a gestational and a genetic mother. This division is guaranteed to the intended parents through the fact that the ovum is obtained from a donor and not from the gestational mother. This practice is incorporated in *The House of Hidden Mothers* when the doctor explains that the ovum is selected from a "data base of egg doners [sic]" (Syal 2015: 210) in order to "find as near a physical match" (210) to the mother. Yet, in a twist of the narrative, Syal questions this sharp conceptual distinction by allowing Dr. Passi's malpractice in using Mala's own ovum in the process: "Mala was called back to receive the embryo that would settle and burrow and feed and become the child that would be half hers, half Toby's, all of Dr. Passi's creation" (214). Mala, unbeknownst to her and the intended parents, is therefore both the gestational mother and the genetic one, consequently validating her motherhood's genetic rights and her relation to both the baby and the father and, ultimately, leading the reader to a nuanced understanding of the novel's ending.

Surrogacy is on the increase and "bourgeoning surrogacy markets have emerged in various countries, notably e.g. parts of the US, India, Thailand or Nepal —or are beginning to emerge (e.g. Mexico, Cambodia, Greece)" (Horsey et al. 2015: 11). India is one of these bourgeoning surrogacy markets that Syal depicts in *The House of Hidden Mothers* to raise questions about the ethics behind reproductive outsourcing and force readers to reflect upon surrogacy as a neo-colonial practice

which constructs women's bodies in India as sites of reproductive exploitation. As Meera Syal's puts it in the novel:

> this was a business transaction, fundamentally. Money made it possible, money was the incentive. Supply and demand, the basis for all successful trading. India had fertile poor women; Britain and America and most places west of Poland had wealthy infertile women. It had begun with companies moving their call centres towards the rising sun, so what was wrong with outsourcing babies there too, when at the end of the process there was a new human being and a woman with financial independence? It was a win-win situation, wasn't it? (2015: 97-98)

This description of the relatively new Indian surrogacy market reminiscent of the long-established practice of outsourcing call centers in India firmly endorses the concept of international surrogacy as a form of reproductive outsourcing and undoubtedly points towards surrogacy as a demand/supply-driven service within which those couples in a position of (financial) power —in a similar way to global companies— choose the best available supplier. Conjointly, surrogacy has been criticized for commodifying women's bodies since the late 1980s when the Baby M case in North America received considerable media attention and proved to be a case in point that foregrounded for the first time the legal and social challenges posed by this form of reproduction. Opponents of this practice stated that "surrogacy unfairly exploited poor women who unwillingly entered contracts that they would come to regret. Critics also claimed that surrogacy degraded children and women by treating children as commodities to be exchanged for profit and women's bodies as childbearing factories" (Scott 2009: 112).

With the free flow of people and capital, the dissolution of boundaries and the global mobility of consumers brought about by globalization, a growing number of infertile couples are resorting to this form of reproduction transnationally — mainly in developing countries and countries where there is an absence of legislation. The appearance of these new markets raises questions about the benefits of globalization and, as the Indian Research Unit for Political Economy has stated, it is a reminder that "the great range of actual measures carried out under the label of globalization […] [are] not those of integration and development. Rather they [are] the processes of imposition, disintegration, underdevelopment and appropriation" (in Loomba 2005: 219). India is one of those countries where the negative effects of globalization are particularly significant in relation to surrogacy, for it has become an attractive destination for couples due to its "modern medical infrastructure" (Witzleb and Chawla 2015: 168). Clinics and medical tourism agencies which provide surrogacy services for the so-called "fertility tourists", together with "packages of services with a bonus of sun, sand, and sea or other holiday attractions" (Gupta 2012: 26) have increased in the country. *The*

House of Hidden Mothers includes a passage with the marketing strategies used by clinics which incorporates a detailed description of the promotional video for the clinic Shyama and Todd select:

> [T]he music snapped off and the face of a fine-boned, almond-eyed Indian woman filled the screen. […] Dr Passi's dulcet tones narrated the story of how she had resigned from her previous post as a consultant obstetrician at one of Delhi's leading private hospitals to found the Passi Clinic. […] "This is a life-changing experience for everyone involved: for the couples who long for a baby, and for the women who carry the child for them. The fees that our surrogate mothers receive enable them to transform their lives: to buy their own homes, educate their children… it gives them financial independence they could not get any other way. […] As for the couples, who visit us from all over the world, because India is now the world centre for ART, they do not only get the gift of a longed-for child, but also they know that their money is going to help the woman who has given a new life to them". (Syal 2015: 91-92)

The clinic's promotional video acquiesces in processes of commercial promotion and, as part of its marketing strategy, incorporates carefully combined elements such as music and the mellow voice of an alluring Dr. Passi. These elements are inscribed with an orientalist nostalgia and patronizing references to the benefits of surrogacy for Indian women; the reference to the payment of fees as an almost philanthropic deed on the part of the western couples could be said to read as a renewed 'white (wo)man's burden'. Dr. Passi assures surrogacy is a life-changing event and *The House of Hidden Mothers* presents, indeed, a nuanced account of the transformation entailed in the experience of surrogacy for four different women: namely Mala, Seema, Shyama and Tara.

The promotional video that reaches intended couples across transnational borders contrasts with the fact that, although located at the center of main urban enclaves, the gestational houses which provide surrogacy services remain, as the title of the novel suggests, simultaneously hidden from the eyes of others: "virtually every woman was there in secret, only their husbands knowing the truth about their confinement" (Syal 2015: 252). The clinic's gestational and birthing factories, where babies are produced and women's commodified bodies are safeguarded, are perceived by Shyama as surreal locations; as a child's make-believe playset; as an estrangement experience by which her femininity is detached from that of other women: "standing outside this building was like seeing the female world in miniature, a living doll's house. Shyama could imagine swinging open the whole frontage like a door and discovering all the women inside, incubating in the heat" (193). Shyama feels detached from these women; yet at the same time, being a second-generation Indian woman in Britain, she has an emotional attachment with the country which, together with the accessibility of the service, underpins her choice of location to find a surrogate mother for her child.

Syal's novel does not fail to make direct reference to the lack of regulation regarding surrogacy in India through Priya, Shyama's friend, who undertakes the initial research on the clinic for her: "Basically, surrogacy is unregulated in India right now, that's why it's cheap. There are guidelines laid down rather than laws, so it varies from clinic to clinic. I chose this one because they seem to be long-established and well-organized" (2015: 92). In order to regulate the practice of surrogate motherhood, the Indian government has been working on a draft of a law known as "The Draft Assisted Reproductive Technology Regulation Bill and Rules" (2008) which has still not been passed. The Draft is undergoing revisions and "thanks to pressure from women's groups the draft was placed on the web site of the Indian Council of Medical Research for comments" (Qadeer and John 2009: 10). In theory this law will regulate the industry of surrogacy, but according to critical voices:

> The Draft Bill tends to regularise and promote the interest of the providers of these technologies rather than regulate and monitor the current practices. The Bill is also inadequate in protecting and safeguarding the rights and health of the women who undergo these procedures, surrogates and egg donors and of the children born through these techniques. The Bill also actively promotes medical tourism in India for reproductive purposes. (Sarojini and Sharma 2009: 36)

The House of Hidden Mothers includes an allusion to this bill and the ways in which it will affect Dr. Passi's successful business: "Here in India, the largest democracy in the world, famed for its tolerance and mix of so many different religions, the parental doors were open to all. But it looked as if that was about to change" (Syal 2015: 127).

In the UK, for its part, a conference entitled "Surrogacy in the 21st Century: Rethinking Assumptions, Reforming Law" took place on May 6 2016 in London. It was designed "to test and challenge the assumptions that underpin the existing UK law on surrogacy, showing how and why it has become out of date, in a variety of different contexts, and how it fails to protect the interests of children and families created via surrogacy" ("Surrogacy in the 21st Century" 2016). The Conference plenary speakers included Professor Margot Brazier and Baroness Mary Warnock, responsible for chairing government inquiries into surrogacy which were published in reports in 1984 and 1998. November 2015 saw the publication of a report about the state of surrogacy in Britain entitled *Surrogacy in the UK: Myth Busting and Reform* undertaken by The Surrogacy UK Working Group on Surrogacy Law Reform. The group carried out a survey on surrogacy in the UK in an attempt to analyze the diversity of information on surrogacy available to UK residents. The report records different sources such as government agencies and diverse organizations with the aim of making recommendations on surrogacy

law reform since the law regulating surrogacy in the UK, the Surrogacy Arrangement Act 1985 (modified by the 1990 Act), has been in place for thirty years. As is stated in the foreword of this ground-breaking document:

> This report seeks to highlight the reality of the practice of surrogacy in the UK in 2015, while recognising the problems that international surrogacy arrangements may bring. It recommends the careful formulation of new legislation on surrogacy which recognises the value of surrogacy as a way of having children and helps to protect and facilitate the altruistic, compensatory nature of surrogacy in the UK while preventing commercialisation and sharp practice. (Horsey et al. 2015:)

The Report Committee's recommendations state that the "new Act will continue to reflect the *altruistic*, *compensatory model* of surrogacy in the UK, while *removing unnecessary barriers* standing in the way of those seeking to use surrogacy or become surrogates and better representing how domestic surrogacy arrangements actually work in practice" (Horsey et al. 2015: 38, emphasis in original). The law in the UK forbids third parties to benefit financially from this exchange. This is a fundamental idea which lies behind the acceptability of the practice of surrogacy around the world, and especially so in the UK: it is altruism. The binary distinction of altruistic versus commercial surrogacy underpins gender stereotypes and reinforces socially-constructed gendered stereotypes, which is the reason why "some surrogacy arrangements are more acceptable than others, that is, some deviate from gender norms whereas others conform" (Roach Anleu 1990: 64). Thus, for instance, altruistic surrogacy arrangements between sisters are generally accepted and even praised, since they conform to "female gender norms of altruism, affection, self-sacrifice, and concern for others' needs" (Roach Anleu 1990: 68). Commercial surrogacy, on the other hand, is construed as being unnatural, as "agreeing to become pregnant for money is seen to reflect pragmatic, selfish, mercenary and instrumental motives —the antithesis of the female role" (Roach Anleu 1990: 71).

I would like to draw on this distinction in my reading of *The House of Hidden Mothers* and the ambivalent responses that the novel has received from critics —as previously mentioned. Syal refuses to openly condemn commercial surrogacy in India and this might be behind some of the adverse responses the novel has received. Indian women who resort to surrogacy as a means of survival are constructed in the western collective imagery as mere victims. Their depiction as self-assertive women who opt for surrogacy goes against presuppositions and becomes a deviation of gender norms. Yet, *The House of Hidden Mothers* challenges an initial reading of Indian surrogate mothers as passive victims of western capitalist demands by presenting a surrogate mother, Mala, who subverts her position as disempowered and ends up, in a fairytale-like twist, winning Todd and occupying Shyama's place. In fact, at the end of the novel Shyama contemplates her former

partner and the child who should have been hers happily living together with Mala: "And then she [Mala] joined them, a sudden brushstroke of colour on the dun landscape in a sari of pink and blue, a basket under her arm. An exotic flower transplanted to this harsh soil, but she seemed to have taken root and thrived" (Syal 2015: 417).

Such a vision of a thriving Mala who has perfectly adapted to her new surroundings, while managing to preserve her identity, as her sari proves, is an adequate ending for a novel which constantly reinforces the connections between India and the UK.[2] These materialize through a depiction of the similar experiences of both Indian and British women in terms of female exploitation and are not only present in the main plot but feature as an undercurrent throughout the novel. This does not entail that this paper should fall into a Eurocentric reading of the novel by which the oppression of women in India is fully equated to that of women in the UK, thus overlooking other factors such as class and power (im)balances. On the contrary, I propose to read the novel as one of the literary reviewers mentioned at the beginning of the paper described it, as "a profound study of the female condition in the rich world and the poor" (Alibhai-Brown 2015). In this light, I read *The House of Hidden Mothers* as a literary effort to bridge the western-constructed gap between 'poor and disempowered' Indian women and 'rich and empowered' British ones. Said gap is explicitly bridged through the novel's ending but also implicitly by the author's engagement throughout the novel, with gender concerns related to the perception and (re)presentation of women's bodies in the United Kingdom. In particular, the novel addresses topics related to beauty ideals, the ageing process and sexual abuse.

Female Bodies under Abuse

Shyama and her best friends, Priya and Lydia, are coming to terms with their ageing process. From the very beginning the novel describes them as well-off and educated mature women: "women *d'un certain* âge, maturing like fine wine or expensive cheese, ripening into what might be regarded in some cultures as their prime years, when the children had flown the nest, the husband had mellowed" (Syal 2015: 5, emphasis in original); yet, the three of them are struggling to accept their bodies and not to fall prey to western demands of beauty. It is not by chance that Shyama owns a beauty salon where women, as she reflects, undertake beauty treatments not for themselves but in order to please their partners and perform according to social demands: "Who is this for? For someone who has not seen my worth for many years? For myself? How can I justify spending money on apricot scrubs and French manicures when I willingly lay my face in the dirt as soon as he

walks through the door?" (84-85). Priya is undoubtedly trapped by the beauty myth, as she is "vulnerable to outside approval, carrying the vital sensitive organ of self-esteem exposed to the air" (Wolf 2002: 14); so much so, that she opted for elective Caesareans at the time of her two children's birth and lied about the real reasons for her choice: "Shyama suspected the real emergency had been Priya's panic at the thought of having her vaginal cavity as big as a bucket. 'Too Punjabi Princess to push' should have been written on her admittance form" (Syal 2015: 86). For her part, Shyama praises Lydia's slender body and associates it with the fact that "she'd never endured the irreparable car crash of childbirth" (73). Lydia's childlessness and Priya's birthing decisions are shown not to be the result of free will, but the consequence of socially-motivated pressures on the female body. Moreover, Shyama's own feelings of failure stemming from her regret that "she had ended up not giving birth naturally" (86) further point to the unceasing pressures and scrutinizing control women are subjected to: "certainly her NCT teacher had made a point of congratulating all the mummies who'd managed to squeeze their babies out without medical intervention" (86). This control regarding every aspect of their female bodies is particularly exacerbated in relation to women's (un)reproductive roles.

Syal's novel constantly reminds the reader of the textuality of the body, of the subtle and direct ways in which women's bodies are continuously inscribed with meanings, of how "one and the same message, inscribed on a male and female body, does not always or even usually mean the same thing or result in the same text" (Grosz 1994: 156). *The House of Hidden Mothers* unveils corporeal social inscriptions that particularly affect women and in so doing opens up the possibility of tracing, questioning and subverting their oppressiveness. Furthermore, the novel examines ageing discourses by recounting the ways in which Shyama's clients and friends ineffectively attempt to fight the passing of time, as they perceive ageing in negative terms; moreover, the novel suggests that "women are more affected by agism than men" (Falcus 2013: 19). The space of Shyama's salon becomes a trope which reinforces discourses on ageing as a decline (Gullette 2004: 37) that has to be feared and countered. Ageing is constructed as a loss or a deprivation through "descriptions of the ageing body as a frail, leaky and unbounded body and assertions that old age is characterised by non-productivity and increasing passivity and dependency" (Sandberg 2013: 11). Lydia's jokes about the fact that they "were passing into [their] next and maybe most important phase of life —the powerful matriarchal elder, the badly behaved granny, take your pick" (Syal 2015: 6) read as a refusal to accept her ageing process. As is stated in the novel: "nowadays no one had to have a real menopause. You could just ignore it, take the drugs which keep a woman's body in a permanent state of faux fertility and parade around in hot chick's clothing, long after the eggs had

left the building" (6). Yet, Shayma's frantic attempt to become a mother and present herself to the world as still fertile and young displays her will to counter the loss that is associated with ageing menopausal female bodies which are "linked not only to the loss of reproductive capacity but also to the assumed loss of both sexual desirability and sexual desire" (Sandberg 2013: 28). Shyama's maternity search is presented in the narrative as another form of gender oppression, an undeniably more subtle form of oppression than that to which poor Indian women are subjected through surrogacy yet another instance of subjugation whereby women's bodies are alienated and re/constructed to fit the demands of patriarchal capitalism.

A clear example of the gender oppression suffered by women in India and the United Kingdom alike is evident in the sexual assault experienced by Shyama's daughter, Tara, in England perpetrated by her friend. This assault prompts her going to India to film a documentary about the New Delhi-based women's activist group called Shakti for her dissertation (Syal 2015: 328): "for Tara, this trip was some kind of absolution. She needed to purify herself and the only way to do it was to give something pure back, balance the abusive act she had endured by fighting abuse elsewhere" (329). The constant references to the sexual abuse of women both in the UK and in India culminate in Syal's inclusion of the horrendous gang rape of Nirbhaya, also known as India's Daughter, on a New Delhi bus on December 16, 2012 and her eventual death in Singapore on December 29. These instances of sexual abuse reinforce one of the main motifs in the novel: the physical violence endured by women at different levels both in the United Kingdom and in India: women who fall prey to beauty ideals, women who undergo physically and emotionally exhausting fertility treatments, women who are objectified as wombs, as commodities to be bought within a capitalist mode of production in a globalized economy.

It is not arbitrary, then, that Mala compares the procedure by which her body is going to be examined to make sure it is viable for surrogacy to a previous sexual assault experienced on a bus:

> Mala lay stiffly on the examination couch, watching anxiously as the doctor woman picked up thin latex gloves, flexing her fingers in preparation. Then she understood those fingers would be going inside her, tapping, pushing, probing. Would it feel as bad as being on the crowded bus to town? The last time Mala had undergone that journey, to buy some *barfi* for Pogle sahib's newborn grandson, she had been shocked by the level of violation. Not just above her clothing but under it, pincer fingers pinching her nipples, fingers so determined and angry they pushed inside her, dragging her trouser material with them, sending hot darts of pain through her trembling legs. She had screamed out and looked around, at the circle of men around her. (Syal 2015: 169, emphasis in original)

Mala's female body is a site of gender exploitation portrayed by Syal as being exercised by men and women alike; first by Dr. Passi, the female specialist who makes a business out of the exploitation of other women and displays no empathy or qualms about the fact that she is participating in the gender oppression of her peers and, thus, catches "herself sometimes regarding the surrogates almost as an alien race, their lack of education and opportunities, and their diminished status as women so far from her own experiences" (123); secondly by Indian men; finally by the western couple who will eventually violate her body-space with the seed of their union.

As Syal depicts it in *The House of Hidden Mothers*, Toby feels uneasy about Dr. Passi's approach when shown the available surrogate mothers' catalogue and Shyama displays a pragmatic attitude: "'Did she [Dr. Passi] really say "browse"? Like we're going shopping?' 'Yup'. Shyama sighed, already surfing the Indian Donor section and wondering if ticking the Graduate Only option made her a fascist or a realist" (2015: 180). While still in the United Kingdom, Shyama is worried about the criticism she might receive for resorting to this form of motherhood and sees herself as a neo-colonial agent who exercises a new form of oppression on Indian soil parallel to that of Imperial Britain: "What would they think of her now, her old lefty student friends, coming back as a fertility tourist? Was she now the colonial memsahib? The benevolent bringer of bounty, or the ruthless trader, smiling her way back home?" (118). Yet, through Tara's views regarding her mother's decision, Syal exonerates Shyama and offers an ambivalent description of western intended mothers: "'it's women once again exploiting other women!' Tara hissed back. 'Mainly because they want to keep some man happy. Mum is not doing this because she wants another kid, she's doing it so Toby won't leave her for somebody younger" (296). With this statement, Syal is challenging a perception of western women who resort to surrogacy as oppressors and presents them as victims of gender stereotypes and social pressures regarding motherhood, thus presenting surrogacy as a multi-layered matter.

Reproductive Outsourcing as Female Exploitation in India

In the novel, Shyama, aged 48, is unable to conceive children with her partner Toby. Her male doctor, Mr. Lalani, describes her womb as "inhospitable" (Syal 2015: 10) and objectifies her from the very beginning by perceiving her as a container rather than a subject. This description of Shyama as a being who has lost her subjectivity forces the reader to question any preconceived ideas about the position of superiority in which the western intended mother is located in comparison to the Indian surrogate one. It places both women as objects of male

scrutiny, and of (male) medical discourse, while portraying them as mere containers of life. As Iris Marion Young argues: "pregnancy does not belong to the woman herself. It is a state of the developing foetus, for which the woman is a container; or it is an objective process coming under scientific scrutiny; or it becomes objectified by the woman herself as a 'condition' in which she must 'take care of herself'" (2005: 46). In this case, Shyama is a hostile container and, as such, she is objectified as the woman who cannot bear life. Mala, for her part, will become the objectified being to whom the couple resorts in order to 'produce' their child, thus decentering the subjectivities of both women in a parallel way.

The House of Hidden Mothers opens in a fertility clinic in London and condemns stereotypes about India and the UK from the very beginning. Shyama enters the clinic and, while queuing, observes the woman in front of her, whom she describes as wearing a perfume which is "woody and expensive, blended with a scent she recognized intimately, a musky aroma with a bitter undertone: the familiar smell of desperation" (Syal 2015: 1). This reference to a desperate woman is a direct connection to the main elements of the plot, Shyama's futile quest to become pregnant and Mala's frantic efforts to leave India, which she eventually achieves by deceitfully playing the western-fitting image of the abused Indian woman in need of rescuing.

Shyama's descripition of the receptionist, for its part, points further towards the connection between India and the United Kingdom that pervades the whole novel, thus helping readers from the start to question clichés associated with the East versus West debate:

> Then Shyama spotted her earrings: silver discs with the Hindu symbol 'Om' engraved on the surface. […] There was a moment of hesitation while Shyama considered commenting on those earrings. But that would spark a conversation about where Shyama came from and yes, she was Hindu, but no, born here, and no, she hadn't been to half the ancient sites that Miss Cupcake had visited, and yes, isn't it humbling that the Indian poor have so little yet they would give you their last piece of chapatti and, despite living knee-deep in refuse, how on earth do they always seem so happy? (Syal 2015: 2)

For Indian women living in rural villages accepting to be surrogate mothers becomes a life-changing event; not only on a physical level, but also on a material and economic one, due to the money they are given from the intended parents, the care they receive in clinics while pregnant and the 'respect' of their husbands who now perceive them as valuable breadwinners. This is the case of Seema, the first woman in Mala's village who mysteriously disappears when there are early signs of pregnancy and returns back from the city, months later "in a taxi, she and the children in new outfits, still with the price sticker on the soles of their chappals.

[…] Days later, the first of the expensive treasures began arriving" (Syal 2015: 38). As portrayed in *The House of Hidden Mothers*, the economic advantages of accepting surrogacy are huge: surrogate mothers can not only afford new clothes but also a "tip-top luxury silver fridge that got tongues wagging again, soo-soo-soo, all over the village" (33). Yet the experience brings about consequences in Seema's case: "Mala could see that Seema had left something of herself behind, as if the city had nibbled quietly, softly at her plump corners, and everything fat and *free* about her had been swallowed up" (38, emphasis added). Seema is no longer free, as she is trapped by the services of her fertile body which is well able to fulfil the capitalist demands of western intended parents.

Nonetheless, Syal's novel challenges a reading of Indian surrogate mothers as passive victims of western capitalist demands. More than that, *The House of Hidden Mothers* presents a surrogate mother, Mala, who constantly subverts her position as a disempowered, 'third world' woman. Non-arbitrarily, Mala is presented from the very beginning of the narrative as a resourceful woman who is able to play the role imposed on her to her own advantage. It is Ram, Mala's husband, who makes the initial decision to resort to surrogacy and, consequently, forces Mala to be photographed with Seema's children as if they were their own: "Only when Ram made Mala do the photograph did she know it was going to happen. He had borrowed a cell phone from Pogle Sahib's son and made her stand outside their house with Seema's children under each arm, their little chicken faces staring out from under her wings" (Syal 2015: 164). The photo becomes the proof of her alleged previous motherhood: "And I look like a mother, their mother, thank God" (167); moreover, it allows Mala to cheat the system. After taking the photo, they both improve the fake narrative of their false parenthood by adjusting Mala's age. But from then on, it is Mala who displays the courage, level-headedness and witticism her husband notably lacks:

> They had worked it out, so she could have been seventeen when she gave birth to Seema's eldest. Ram was more nervous than her, his leg jiggling beneath the desk. Mala kicked him, catching his ankle. God, *chalo*, be a man and stare straight back at her, what can she prove? Everyone knows we don't have paperwork where we come from and she needs us to make money for her, understand? (167, emphasis in original)

Mala is well aware of the business transaction they are undertaking and of the fact that she is a much needed link in the commercial chain: "She [Dr. Passi] needs us to make money for her" (Syal 2015: 167). Mala's strength is reinforced through the way in which she perceives her husband once she is already pregnant with Toby's child: "she saw nothing she did not expect: not anger, not violence, but a fearful sorrow. A man burnt by the sun and thinned by hard labour, staring at this

wife, knowing he would never understand her and could not control her, so what else remained?" (226-227). The answer to this rhetorical question is Mala's subsequent action; playing the role of the victimized woman, Mala makes Toby and Shyama believe that Ram behaves violently towards her: "Ram never meant to hit her. In fact, he still wasn't sure that he actually had. […] One minute his hand was in the air, the next Mala was lying curled up on the floor, clutching herself and screaming loudly enough for the red-hair woman and her blond *chamcha* to come running" (228). Toby instinctively protects Mala in a scene that reproduces the well-known quotation from Spivak's seminal article "Can the Subaltern Speak?" in relation to the practice of sati: "white men seeking to save brown women from brown men" (1988: 305), which Syal also incorporates in her narrative through the character or Dhruv, the young man Tara befriends in India (2015: 342). As Spivak goes on to state, "between patriarchy and imperialism, subject-constitution and object formation the figure of the woman disappears" (1988: 306). *The House of Hidden Mothers* might be read as a literary exercise by which the figure of the surrogate woman, as a subject, does not disappear in this economic transaction, nor is she rescued by white men and women or by legislation, but presents herself as an agent who (re)acts and implements change from her own initial position of perceived enforced 'subalternity'.

Mala epitomizes the transition from being an object controlled by others to becoming a subject of her own life. Mala travels to England with Shyama and Todd, displays an unquenchable thirst for knowledge, further improves her English, though in India "she [already] could read and write […] so well, top of her class everytime" (Syal 2015: 68), and perfectly adapts to her new environment: "it was surprising how quickly Mala settled into the routine at Surya Beauty Salon" (307). Mala helps Shyama in the salon creating natural beauty products in the form of facial scrubs and body lotions and realizes her potential freedom from the moment she clutches her passport, wanting to "press it to her nose and inhale the newness and promise of its leathery smell" (255). It might read as problematic that Syal chooses to present the United Kingdom as the land of opportunity for Mala, since this could be interpreted as a return to a representation of the western world as the location which offers the possibility of advancement and progress —were it not for the fact that the novel presents India as the place where Shyama's daughter, Tara, fully recovers from her experience of sexual abuse, and forecasts a promising future in India for Tara, Dhruv and their soon-to-be-born baby.

The House of Hidden Mothers crosses Tara's and Mala's lives over thus offsetting the "West versus East" moral balance. The United Kingdom is not portrayed as a liberating place where women enjoy freedom and equality; neither is India portrayed as a gendered oppressive location. In fact, Syal's narrative presents both

places as spaces where experiences are "still to come, unknown and unnamed, waiting to be lived" (2015: 419). Through this final last sentence, the novel provides an open ending in which India and the United Kingdom alike offer the female protagonists the possibility of starting anew and firmly rooting a sense of identity and belonging. The novel undoubtedly raises questions about surrogacy in India as a neo-colonial practice by which women's bodies are used as sites of reproductive exploitation and babies become commodities to be exchanged in a globalized market economy. However, Syal's narrative forces readers to challenge both preconceived ideas about surrogacy and, by addressing themes such as ageing and sexual abuse, the novel also calls into question a supposedly achieved female liberation in the United Kingdom, while simultaneously problematizing the duality First-Third World woman. Throughout the novel, Syal deploys a humorous tone to push moral and ethical boundaries with the aim of unsettling and redrawing them and, in so doing, aligns her new literary accomplishment with her previous achievements as a comedian and actress. On the whole, the novel emphasizes the impending need to consider surrogacy as a multi-layered and multifaceted matter when passing judgment on this form of motherhood/parenthood.

Notes

[1]. The research for this article was conducted as part of the research project "The Politics, Aesthetics and Marketing of Literary Formulae in Popular Women's Fiction: History, Exoticism and Romance" (FFI2016-75130-P) (AEI/FEDER, UE).

[2]. This reference is reminiscent of Monica Ali's *Brick Lane* (2004) which ends with Nazneen ice-skating in a Sari (492), a powerful trope for her negotiation of a new hybrid British-Asian identity.

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HOSTS, GUESTS AND PARASITES IN HELENA MARIA VIRAMONTES' "THE CARIBOO CAFÉ"[1]

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Abstract

The correlation between immigrants and parasites is a common theme in political discourse. The nation-state assumes the role of a living organism that allows the entrance of an alien, a guest of sorts, who, in turn, endangers the wellbeing of the host. Such is the initial vision of the migrant woman in Helena Maria Viramontes' "The Cariboo Café" (1995). Drawing from Michel Serres, Jaques Derrida and Mireille Rosello, this article analyses the story from the perspective of the hospitality framework. The figure of the parasite appears as a liminal figure that establishes a symbiotic relationship with the host both on the social and the linguistic levels. As a disturber of peace and order, the parasite disrupts the traditional relations with the abused guest. In the story, the café owner's gatekeeping activities, both linguistic and ideological, become suspended. The opposition between host/guest-parasite, legal/illegal, inside/outside opens to an infinite range of possibilities between alleged polar opposites.

Keywords: parasite, hospitality, hostility, immigration, guest, host, chicano.

Resumen

La conexión entre los inmigrantes y los parásitos es un tema recurrente en el discurso político. El estado-nación asume el papel de organismo vivo que acepta la

entrada de un organismo ajeno, una especie de invitado, que pone en peligro el bienestar del anfitrión. Esta es la imagen de la mujer inmigrante en la historia de Helena Maria Viramontes "The Cariboo Cafe" (1995). Este artículo se apoya en las propuestas de Michel Serres, Jacques Derrida y Mireille Rosello para analizar el relato utilizando la teoría de la hospitalidad como marco de referencia. La imagen del parásito emerge como figura liminar que establece una relación simbiótica con el anfitrión tanto en el plano social como lingüístico. Como agente que perturba la paz y el buen orden, el parásito desestabiliza la imagen tradicional del huésped como sujeto maltratado. En el relato, las funciones del dueño del café como vigilante fronterizo, tanto en el plano lingüístico como ideológico, quedan canceladas. Los pares binarios anfitrión/invitado-parásito, legal/ilegal, interno/externo se resquebrajan y dan lugar a un abanico indeterminado de posibilidades entre los presuntos polos opuestos.

Palabras Clave: parásito, hospitalidad, hostilidad, inmigración, huésped, anfitrión, chicano.

> *Our collective is the expulsion of the stranger, of the enemy, of the parasite. The laws of hospitality become laws of hostility. Whatever the size of the group, from two on up to all human kind, the transcendental condition of its constitution is the existence of the Demon.*
>
> Michel Serres, *The Parasite*

The hospitality of countries towards migrants and refugees has become a major concern in contemporary political discourse. Defined by the Oxford Dictionary as "the act or practice of being hospitable; the reception and entertainment of guests, visitors, or strangers, with liberality and goodwill", hospitality has made a comeback at a time of mass migrations and forced relocations. For Tahar Ben Jelloun hospitality is "the act of taking somebody into one's home without any thought of recompense". Three aspects are involved in the ritual, for there is an action (a welcome); an attitude (the opening of oneself to the face of another); and a principle (disinterestedness) (1999: 1-2). This opening out towards the guest is not totally disinterested, as Jelloun explains, for "entertaining a guest is something that both honors and humanizes the host. [… and also] makes the guest recognize me, the host, as someone capable of sharing" (1999: 2). The guest "makes me confront myself. He upsets my space and my habits and teaches me what I am. It's a kind of test" (1999: 3). Levinas has explained that the Other or *xenos* brings "a certain disquietude, as a derangement which puts us out of our common tracks" (Waldenfels 2002: 63). For Derrida, the *xenos* or foreigner "shakes up the threatening dogmatism of the paternal *logos*" and contests "the authority of the chief, the father, the master of the family, the 'master of the house'" (2000b: 5). Astride the home or *chez soi* on the one hand and the outside on the other,

hospitality opens the self to the unknown. Hospitality therefore situates itself at the heart of a tension, for the welcoming of the Other is an act that constitutes both individual and communal or national identity: "It is the act through which the home —and the homeland— constitutes itself in the gesture of turning to address its outside" (McNulty 2007: viii). This narrative of opening, however, runs counter to the rejection of the Other as an essential process of identity building. The expulsion of the other, portrayed as the stranger, the enemy or the parasite, is deeply embedded in our consciousness, as Michel Serres explains. There will always be some groups that will be envisioned as hosts while others will be imagined as temporary visitors, guests, or simple parasites that need to be expelled or chased out.

This article explores the encounter between a well-established host or café owner and a guest-parasite in Helena Viramontes' "The Cariboo Café", a story included in *The Moths and Other Stories* (1995). There is no welcoming of the tired masses in the story, and the verses engraved on the pedestal of the Statue of Liberty have become ostensibly obsolete. Hospitality is not depicted as the welcoming of the Other, as an opening that tests the individual and/or communal identity. As a result of the accidental encounter between self and Other, the former "can also become unhomely, *unheimlich*, estranged by the introduction of something foreign that threatens to contaminate or dissolve its identity" (McNulty 2007: viii). This threatening exteriority of the Other fits the vision of the immigrants as depicted in the story. Subsumed under the category of guests or parasites, the immigrants are envisioned as freeloaders always ready to parasitize on the generous host country. Viramontes' story has elicited a wide variety of critical responses. Sonia Saldívar-Hull has analysed the text from a feminist perspective (1991); Saldívar has concentrated on the liminal features of a narrative "built on a series of multiple border crossings and multilayered transitions" (1997: 99). Saldívar-Hull and Saldívar agree with Barbara Harlow that the aesthetic crossings of the story in terms of plot, structure and the time-space axes reflect the challenging of the ideology of national borders and "its agenda of depoliticization in the interest of hegemony" (Harlow 1991: 152). Another set of critics focus on the arrival rather than the crossing. Carbonell portrays Los Angeles, the setting of the story, as inhospitable to survivors (1999: 59). Dean Franco offers a nuanced reading of the workings of the border in the story. Franco portrays the border not only as a contested site of oppression situated on the contours of the United States, but also within America. The border is "a *version* of America" (2002: 125). More recently, Hamilton has analysed the story in conversation with city spaces in a post-liberal or fortress LA (2011: 47). Drawing from Michel Serres' *The Parasite* and Mireille Rosello's *Postcolonial Hospitality*, this article examines Viramontes' story from the perspective of the hospitality framework. It argues that the category of the alleged

parasite appears fuzzier and vaguer than initially thought. Both the host and the parasite seem to be part of a symbiotic relationship that dismantles stable categories and establishes new forms of exchange.

I. Hosts, Guests and Parasites

> *There are some black spots in language. The field of the host is one such dark puddle. In the logic of exchange, or really instead of it, it manages to hide who the receiver and who the sender is, which one wants war and which one wants peace and offers asylum.*
>
> Michel Serres, *The Parasite*

Astride identity and relation, the figure of the host is, indeed, a black spot in language. The host and the guest share not only the spaces of hospitality but also the intrinsic continuity between the two categories. As Benveniste demonstrates, the concept of hospitality is grounded on two different families of words, "one evoking the notion of 'reciprocity', the other the seemingly opposed notion of 'personal identity'" (McNulty 2007: ix). The Latin *hospes* is made up of the elements *hosti-pet-s*, where two different roots —*hostis*, meaning "guest" or "host", and *pet*, meaning "master"— converge (McNulty 2007: x). This bifurcation at the heart of hospitality is applicable to the figure of the host, which splits between host and guest. Not in vain, in French, the word *hôte* refers to both host and guest, as Derrida explains:

> The *hôte* who receives (the host), the one who welcomes the invited or received *hôte* (the guest), the welcoming *hôte* who considers himself the owner of the place, is in truth a *hôte* received in his own home. He receives the hospitality that he offers in his own home; he receives it from his own home —which, in the end, does not belong to him. The *hôte* as host is a guest. (Derrida 1999: 41)

Another black spot in language, it is possible to claim, is that of the guest, a figure that etymologically and conceptually partakes of the position of the host yet may slip into the position of the parasite. Immigrants, refugees, and asylum seekers are often envisioned as guests of the host nation-state (Cf. Molz and Gibson 2007: 8). The inadequacy of the immigrant as guest metaphor has been explored by Mireille Rosello in *Postcolonial Hospitality*. Immigrant workers, the critic clarifies, are not to be regarded as guests for they are simply hired (2001: 9). When a country invites immigrants it is not because that country is being unconditionally or infinitely hospitable. If the migrant's stay is regulated by a time frame or a contract, there is no reason, argues Rosello, to identify the nation-state as a house. The "so-called hospitality of nations", the critic suggests, "may more closely resemble commercial hospitality". Given this clarification,

Rosello continues, it seems more accurate to imagine the state as the place where commercial hospitality takes place, that is, as a hotel (2001: 34). Logically, the notion of the hotel versus the private house changes the nature of the guest: "Recognizing that the foreigner is locked in a commercial logic with the so-called host nation would at least allow cultural commentators to articulate a description of the immigrant as 'paying' guest" (2001: 35). Although the concept of paying guest dismantles the image of migration as an uncontrollable tide or invasion at the threshold of the nation-state, the image of the migrant as parasite crystalized in the American imaginary throughout the 20th century. The discourse of nativism, from Proposition 187 in California to campaign promises in the 2010s,[2] create the image of the immigrant as parasite sponging off the welfare of the United States. All kinds of social illness, from this perspective, can be attributed to invasive foreign bodies (Inda 2000: 47). J.X. Inda, for example, traces how nativist rhetoric has transformed the Mexican immigrant in particular into a parasite intruding on the body of the host nation, "drawing nutrients from it, while providing nothing to its survival and even threatening its well-being" (2000: 47). The nation-state is thus depicted as a living organism that gracefully and generously allows the entrance of an alien, a guest of sorts, who in turn endangers the wellbeing of the host, transformed into an abused and endangered host; or, more precisely, into a hostage. The alien Other, the stranger, and the immigrant, Inda states, "are often construed as threats to the integrity of the nation" (2000: 48). The alleged parasitized country is a particular kind of nation-state, based on a stable vision of who is always at home and who is not. Racialized nativism, from this perspective, creates the image of the immigrant as a threat to the welfare of the population. According to this rhetoric the immigrant always gains in the exchange, where the host nation-state always loses (Inda 2000: 51), for immigrants are customarily depicted as unstoppable waves of parasitic aliens "set on (ab)using our social services, refusing to 'assimilate', and adding to the crime and social pathologies" (Suárez Orozco in Inda 2000: 50) of the countries they arrive at. However, just as the *hôte* in Derrida's formulation is both welcoming and at the same time hosted or received in his own home, we would like to mobilize the apparently parasitic relationship between host and parasite, between nation-state and immigrant. The host receives the hospitality in his/her own home, from a home that does not belong to him/her. The nation-state as host may also be a parasite, to go back to Derrida's *Adieu*.

But what is a parasite? As defined by the Online Etymology Dictionary, a parasite is "a hanger-on, a toady, person who lives on others", from Middle French *parasite* (16c.) or directly from Latin *parasitus* "toady, sponger", and directly from Greek *parasitos* "one who lives at another's expense, person who eats at the table of another", from noun use of an adjective meaning "feeding beside", from

para- "beside", and sitos "food". "Para", J. Hillis Miller explains, is an antithetical prefix "signifying at once proximity and distance, similarity and difference, interiority and exteriority, something inside a domestic economy and at the same time outside it, something simultaneously this side of a boundary line, threshold or margin, and also beyond it, equivalent in status and also secondary or subsidiary […]" (1979: 219). This ambiguity at the linguistic level echoes in the liminal position of the parasite, in and out, occupying a space that dispels the traditional opposition between outside and inside. Originally, Miller remarks that the parasite was another guest sharing food. Later on it evolved to refer to a professional dinner guest who never gave dinners in return (1979: 220). For Michel Serres "a parasite is an abusive guest, an unavoidable animal, a break in a message" (2007: 8). To the biological and sociological meanings Serres adds a third (which we can call "parasitic") element, "a break in a message" that triangulates the alleged abusive interaction between host and parasite, noise, as I describe later. The philosopher draws from the rich semantic field of the word *parasite* in French to claim that in all communication noise and parasites are "elements that cannot be defined negatively as impurities simply to be excluded but are, in fact, fundamental elements to be integrated into the definition of any relational system" (Schrift 2014: 183). What does a parasite do? For Serres, it makes noise, produces toxins, inflammation, fever. In short, it excites the milieu" (2007: 144) and creates a new balance: "The parasite straightens things out, creating an irreversible circulation, a meaning, making meaning" (2007: 185). Both host and parasite create a new exchange and order through a new symbiotic relationship, for "There is no parasite without a host. The host and the somewhat sinister or subversive parasite are fellow guests beside the food, sharing it" (Miller 1979: 220). Parasitism for Serres is the central fact of existence. Without the interruption of the parasite, a system would be entirely closed from the outside. Without the parasite there is no relation (Brown 2013: 96). This is the symbiotic relationship this article explores in "The Cariboo Café".

II. "The Cariboo Café": National Hostility, Commercial Hospitality

> *Fluctuation, disorder, opacity, and noise are not and are no longer affronts to the rational; we no longer speak of this rational, we no longer divvy things up in isms, simple and stiff puzzles, strategic plans for the final conflict. Thus a system has interesting relations according to what it deemed to be its faults or depreciations. What then about its noises and parasites. Can we rewrite a system […] not in the key of preestablished harmony but in what he [Leibniz] called seventh cords?*
>
> Michel Serres, *The Parasite*

Although the United States uses the model of hospitality to portray the country's relationship with its immigrants, Ali Behdad, following Mireille Rosello in *Postcolonial Hospitality*, explains that this model obscures the economics of immigration and also the disciplining of its aliens by the state apparatus (Behdad 2005: 14, 9). Hostility, rather than hospitality, has structured the United States' dealings with its migrants.[3] The hostility of the host country is evident from the opening of "The Cariboo Café": the family arrived "in the secrecy of night" as befits displaced people. There is only a temporary and conditional occupation in the host country: they stayed for a week, a month, eventually for a lifetime. The idea was to create a home, a finer future "where the toilet was one's own" (Viramontes 1995: 65), and the children did not need to be frightened. As in other renditions such as Sandra Cisneros' *The House on Mango Street* (1984), this version of the American Dream proves hard to achieve, and in the meantime, the family has to be content with occupying a different spatiality, a geography of invisibility and disposability. Thus the children had to play "in the back alleys, among the broken glass" (Viramontes 1995: 65). Significantly, these are the spaces of hospitality in the story, a set of spatial coordinates more accurately defined as pertaining to hostility. Hostility permeates the rules the parents inculcate in the children. There is no contact with the outside world, and only the key to the apartment can protect the children from looming chaos and deportation. "The poli" are the visible face of hostility, and, as defined by the children's father, they are "men in black who get kids and send them to Tijuana" (67). They are, indeed, an impersonation of the boogey man. The children are admonished to run if they see them, for the poli hates them (67). Once the key is lost, however, there is no longer an inside/outside, and the threat of the outside becomes real. Sonya and Mackey become two homeless children exiled from the conditional hospitality of the home. Significantly, there is no home in the story as defined by Gaston Bachelard in *The Poetics of Space*. Bachelard claims that "the house shelters daydreaming, the house protects the dreamer, the house allows one to dream in peace" (1994: 6). There are just temporary occupations of non-homes where the children and the nameless woman from Central America will seek refuge, namely the Cariboo Café and a hotel. Both qualify as non-places according to Marc Augé's categorization. If a place "can be defined as relational, historical and concerned with identity, then a space which cannot be defined as relational, or historical, or concerned with identity will be a non-place" (Augé 1995: 77-78). Only Miss Ávila, who regularly takes care of the children while the parents are at work, could offer them a safe sanctuary if the children could only retrace their steps back to her. Between the family apartment and Miss Avila's home, however, an inhospitable stretch of streets unfolds. "Things never looked the same when backwards", Sonya finds out as she searched for familiar scenes" that were no

longer there (Viramontes 1995: 66). The nocturnal landscape, "a maze of alleys and dead ends, the long, abandoned warehouses shadowing any light" (67), confirms the new hostile urban layout. Only the Cariboo Café, described as "a beacon of light at the end of a dark sea" (68) appears as the place of possible hospitality.

In the absence of hospitality at the national level, the story only offers commercial hospitality, as section II illustrates. Narrated from the point of view of the café owner, the section offers his confession or deposition. He appears as the manager of a closed and orderly system: his café is clean; he is "honest", and he offers the best prices on "double-burger deluxes" (Viramontes 1995: 68). The word "deluxe", however, seems to be out of place in this particular setting, and he hastens to clarify that the meat is not pure beef but he tells his clients up front. From the beginning of his narrative it seems clear that the owner is intent on creating a system, a micro nation-state that is apparently open to all. However, and even if a "system is often described as harmony", as Serres comments "we know of no system that functions perfectly, that is to say, without losses, flights, wear and tear, errors, accidents, opacity —a system whose return is one for one, where the yield is maximal, and so forth" (2007: 12-13). There are, as we find in the story, losses, flights, errors, opacity and accidents that tear this fabric of perfection and leave blood stains on the scrubbed floor. Wendy Swyt argues that the eruption of the grotesque "disrupts the symbolic regulation of the social body" (1998: 197). For Serres there is an equivalency between work and police, between regulating, creating order, checking permits and acting as a customs officer (2007: 91). The reason is that in creating order any particular system has to chase out disorder.

Seemingly aware of this tension between order and chaos, admission and rejection, the café owner claims he will never put up stupid signs restricting entry to his café/system, such as "We reserve the right of refuse service to anyone", or, "No shirt, no shoes, no service" (Viramontes 1995: 68), thus depicting the café as a welcoming space. As the story unfolds, however, the reader is aware of a counter narrative of hostility that is manifest in the owner's perception of potential customers as "scum" that has to eat. To his own credit he adds that he even received "that crazy lady and the two kids that started all the trouble" (69). Derrida explains that "hospitality is owed to the other as stranger: But if one determines the other as stranger, one is already introducing the circles of conditionality that are family, nation, state, and citizenship" (2000a: 8). By qualifying customers as "scum" or crazy he is creating his own circles of conditionality and border-patrolling his business against the Other. The owner reveals himself as the rationalist that believes that order is under siege by the Other, by disorder and noise (cf. Serres 2007: 14). He is not only talking about street people like whores or out-of-luckers, but also drug addicts such as Paulie. Paulie

opens the series of three that introduces the presence of the undesired, the abject, the disturber of the peace. As a drug addict, he is the first manifestation of the guest-parasite, substance abuser, and hospitality abuser. The café is also the ephemeral sanctuary for three illegal workers from the illegal factory during a police raid.[4] In the owner's characterization, they seem to be "roaches when the lightswitch goes on" (Viramontes 1995: 71). To this constellation of undesirables Viramontes adds a new arrival: the unnamed woman that has found the lost children. Together they come into the café, the non-place turned into temporary sanctuary. Their presence is a reminder of the return of the excluded, the repressed, the alleged parasites that keep returning to the feast (cf. Serres 2007: 97).

Hostility marks the encounter between the café owner/host and the woman/guest from the start: "Already I know that she's bad news because she looks street to me. Round face, burnt-toast color, black hair that hangs like straight ropes. Weirdo" (Viramontes 1995: 69), he comments. The woman is automatically transformed into the racialized Other, a displaced street person, a weirdo ready to introduce chaos in the fragile system of the café. Her mere presence beckons an exhortation, a free meal he is not ready to provide, as he comments: "Shit if I have to dish out a free meal" (69). From the beginning of the encounter with the woman, the reluctant host perceives her as a parasite ready to sponge off his good will. It is possible to escalate this fear of the uninvited and abusive guest onto the national sphere. Migrants, from this perspective, can be depicted as guests uninvited into the nation state, ready to sponge off resources of regular working class people, as the racialized nativist discourse propounds. To this act of automatic essentialization, the café owner adds a narrative of neglect. The dried snot all over Macky's face suggests the mother cannot take care of herself, let alone of her children. It is, indeed, another feature of the parasite, for they can never nourish their own children (Serres 2007: 131).

Initially there is no sound attached to the interaction between host and guest. When sound comes in, and the owner hears the lady saying something in Spanish, he immediately conceptualizes the woman as illegal, as belonging south of the border: "Right off I know she's illegal, which explains why she looks like a weirdo" (Viramontes 1995: 70). Illegality is associated with the way a language sounds and with specific physical traits, as if creating a particular isomorphism of language and ethnicity. The host stands as the commanding figure, representing power and the source of the emission of sound. As the cook/host waits on the woman there unfolds a parallel process where the dominant language assumes the mastery over the language of the Other, which is transformed into a precarious guest/parasite language. A guest and a guest language share similar limitations and are subjected to different forms of mastery.[5] Spanish as a guest/parasite language appears to be

a street language automatically associated with what the cook sees as a disposable and parasitical social group. Spanish becomes an unwanted guest or parasite when compared to English, the host language. Like the master/host, a host language derives its power from the place where it is spoken, from being *chez soi*, as well as from a community of peers that defines it as the majority language. Whatever does not sound organically native and pertaining to the land is deemed illegal, marginal or backward. The cook voices the well-known isomorphism of a country that views itself as white, English-speaking and preferably Anglo-Saxon. Different languages and skin colors fall into the category of the parasitical Other. For the cook, Spanish is just noise, a "parasitic dissonance", in Serres' words (2007: 127), another disturber of the peace and order.

The parasite eats but also speaks, and his or her presence is tantamount to a burst of static, to a break in a message (Serres 2007: 8). For the philosopher, "The introduction of a parasite in a system is equivalent to the introduction of a noise" (2007: 184). In *Hermès I: La Communication*, Serres describes noise as "set of interference phenomena that become obstacles to communication" (1968: 49). Noise, in Serres depiction, is the parasitic element impossible to do without, for it is present in every aspect of order making: "The chaos of the zero state, before the first day, endures throughout the week and even enters paradise" (2007: 87). Not in vain, the critic claims, "In the beginning was the noise" (2007: 13). Noise is inextricably related to difference, disorder and the irrational. It is the always already there that is inherent to the production of order. As a complex of obstacles to communication, noise, in fact, is the background for all forms of communication, "a sort of Ur-noise" comparable to formless matter (Assad 1999: 19). For every attempt at creating a neat, orderly and rational system there will always be a parallel process of noise making, as Serres remarks: "The very production of order, secretion, the organism itself undertaking production, are all struggling to exit, struggling against a never-ending noise, against being dragged down toward the mortal fate of mixtures" (2007: 87).

Serres' exploration of noise as inextricable from order making can illuminate the host's reaction to the unnamed woman and her speech. His reaction to Spanish as an illegal language, and as noise is problematic, for, even if characterized as the language of the parasite, Spanish brings echoes of the tone of voice his exwife, Nell, used with him in a moment of tenderness, when he would put his head on her lap. Spanish, it is possible to claim, may be the unwanted guest/parasite in his café but also in his life. Moreover, Spanish peppers his own discourse, as the sentence "you comprende, buddy?" (Viramontes 1995: 69) illustrates. This act of code-switching implies a disturbance of the linguistic system. Revealingly, the cook is already browning his own discourse, significantly borrowing Spanish words to

convey his message. The cook, in some way, is participating in noise-making. He is imperceptibly secreting his own noise, and being dragged, in the process, down to the "the mortal fate of mixtures" (Serres 2007: 87). The path of mixtures is not only linguistic, for the image of parasite immigrants and parasite languages is further compromised when to the cook's surprise the woman pays with a fiver. She may be a guest in the country, but she is a "paying" guest. The paying part seems to invalidate the alleged parasitical relationship with the United States. The question, then, is who is the host and who is the parasite, or who is more of a parasite than the other.

III. Quiet Invitations

> *Today immigrants appear as threatening outsiders, knocking at the gates, or crashing the gates, or sneaking through the gates into societies richer than those from which the immigrants came. The immigration-receiving countries behave as though they were not parties to the process of immigration. But in fact they are partners. International migrations stand at the intersection of a number of economic and geopolitical processes that link the countries involved; they are not simply the outcome of individuals in search of better opportunities. Part of the problem of understanding immigration is recognizing how, why, and when governments, economic actors, media, and populations at large in highly developed countries participate in the immigration process.*
>
> Saskia Sassen, *Guests and Aliens*

Saskia Sassen's words establish the symbiotic relation between guests and hosts, between receiving and sending countries. It is a partnership that inextricably links both sets of players. There are no hosts without guests, just as there are no hosts without parasites and vice versa. Yet this "participation" is never part of the discourse of immigration, especially at a time when hospitality is no longer a mark of civilization. Significantly there are few laws mandating the welcoming of the Other,[6] but there are plenty of laws and regulations restricting or outlawing the giving of shelter to a migrant.[7] For Tahar Ben Jelloun the partnership between hosts and guests is embedded in the roots and routes of migration. For the writer the migrant does not turn up out of the blue, but is "set by History on the path that leads to my house (my country), to a place where he will be received as a guest" (Jelloun 1999: 6). History can place a particular country on the path to migration for many reasons such as colonialism, invasion or political interference: "The whole significance of immigration lies in the fact that the immigrant is expected. The Other is on his way. Maybe he wasn't formally asked to come, but somehow or other the invitation was issued" (1999: 6). The invitation may not have been voiced, but it is frequently based on the host country's dealings with

other countries. As the well-known saying goes, the immigrant is *here* because the host country illegally crossed its own borders and was *there* (Cf. Carbonell 1999: 59; Franco 2002: 127).

Section III in "The Cariboo Café" explores the nature of this quiet "invitation" to the United States. Narrated from the point of view of the unnamed woman, it traces the regime of terror imposed in an unspecified Central American country during the 80's, when the United States aided the Contras in their armed conflict against the Sandinista Government of Nicaragua. Viramontes, however, does not provide details of the war or of the conflicting countries. Instead, the writer foregrounds the suffering of a mother who tries in vain to find her missing son, Geraldo. As happened to Sonya and Macky at the opening of the story, there will be no home for this unnamed woman and her son. The section opens with a place that is its polar opposite, a location called "the detainers", where children are forced to work for their food sorting out body parts. The unnamed woman thinks her son is living (or dying) there. Her motherly worries as to whether or not he has lice and is cold seem totally out of place in the face of the most inhospitable non-place of the story. Face to face with an official only a few years older than her son, she learns that Geraldo falls into the category of the enemy spy, his age (five) notwithstanding. "Anyone who so willfully supports the Contras in any form must be arrested and punished without delay" (Viramontes 1995: 73), is his own explanation. When she claims that her son is just a baby, the bureaucrat retorts that Contras are tricksters who know how to exploit people's ignorance. She is dismissed as a foolish woman while he assures her they will try to locate her son, whom he mistakenly calls "Pedro". The names of "Contras" are easily interchangeable for this boy turned into bureaucrat. Fittingly, the woman joins the ranks of women who have lost their sons and becomes another impersonation of La Llorona. Shunned by her community, she feels that her home is no longer her home: "Weeds have replaced all good crops. The irrigation ditches are clouded with bodies. [… W]e try to live as best we can under the rule of men who rape women then rip their fetuses from their bellies" (1995: 75). The mutation of the home into the non-home, it is possible to claim, sets the woman, just as it set many Central Americans (if we follow Jelloun's argument) on her way to the United States. Immigrants are therefore expected. There might have been no formal invitation, but somehow or other the invitation was issued. The arrival of the immigrant reawakens the conversation about limits and national sovereignty. The United States may or may not open its borders to paying guests while Central American countries saw their borders violated through different phases of American intervention[8] during the 1980s. Even if there was no open invitation for the unnamed woman, the invitation was issued, indirectly, through the political upheaval of Central America. The money she saved for Geraldo's schooling is

enough for a bus to Juarez. Her nephew, Tavo, who already lives in the United States, meets her there and welcomes her into a crowded home. In the United States the woman is still a washerwoman: she cleans toilets, dumps trash cans. She can hardly be characterized as a parasite.

IV. The Logic of Fuzzy: Hosts, Parasites and Never Ending Noise

> *The Devil or the Good Lord? Exclusion, inclusion? Thesis or antithesis? The answer is a spectrum, a band, a continuum. We will no longer answer with a simple yes or no to such questions of sides. Inside or outside? Between yes and no, between zero and one, an infinite number of values appear, and thus an infinite number of answers. Mathematicians call this new rigor 'fuzzy': fuzzy subsets, fuzzy topology.*
>
> Michel Serres, *The Parasite*

> *One might even state that objects, like properties and relations, are by and large beset by vagueness.*
>
> Jean-Louis Hippolyte, *Fuzzy Fiction*

The unnamed woman's nocturnal wanderings and the children's attempt at retracing their steps back to Miss Avila cross paths at the end of section III. In her derangement, she thinks she has finally found Geraldo in Macky. Her own doubts when seeing the boy and Macky's bewilderment are put aside and she grabs the boy as her own child. It is, as she comments, like giving birth to Geraldo/Macky once again. A hot meal is in order to celebrate this reunion, and the trio enters the Cariboo Café. There is no home for this reconstituted family, and they will only see the faces of commercial hospitality, first the café and later a hotel. The woman, the omniscient narrative voice reveals, will make arrangements to return home the following day. For the first time in years, the narrative voice adds, the woman's mind is "quiet of all noise and she has the desire to sleep" (Viramontes 1995: 77). In the morning they return to the non-place of the Cariboo Café. The omniscient narrative voice moves to the café owner, who is shocked to see her transformation: "Her hair is combed slick back into one thick braid and her earrings hang like baskets of golden pears on her finely sculpted ears" (77). Looking different and young, the voice concludes, she is "almost beautiful" (77). The initial burnt-toast color subsides in this new vision of an attractive woman. His gatekeeping activities, both linguistic and ideological, seem suspended. The system of rejection of the Other, the presumed parasite halts and opens to the principle of fuzziness, understood as vagueness. The opposition between host/guest-parasite, legal/illegal, inside/outside opens out to the infinite range of possibilities between

alleged polar opposites, between "yes and no, between zero and one, an infinite number of values appear", Serres argues (2007: 58).

This opening up of an apparent closed system is consistent with the 'theory of fuzzy', a paradigm that harks back to the prevalence of uncertainty, ambiguity and vagueness in postmodern literature. Fuzziness is a vagueness "that appears both salient and pervasive, affecting objects as well as concepts, the observer and the observed, and finally offering a paradoxical coincidence of presence and absence, a ubiquity of being and not-being" (Hippolyte 2006: 11). It is also a coexistence of the alleged antithetical roles of host and guest/parasite. The study of fuzziness goes back to Bertrand Russell, who, in his attempt to reduce "all of mathematics to logic symbols", found that math symbols did not match the concepts of the physical world. This asymmetry is commonly known as the "mismatch problem" and can be traced back to Descartes (Hippolyte 2006: 12). Following upon Russell, Lofti Zadeth coined the term *fuzzy* to address this lack of correspondence. Fuzziness addresses both quantity and quality. Just as there are different degrees within properties, there is permeability between apparently discreet entities, for "boundaries are objectively fuzzy" (Tye in Hippolyte 2006: 13). It is possible to state, according to Hippolyte, that "objects, like properties and relations, are by and large beset by vagueness" (2006: 13). Vagueness creates new intersections in the café. Just as the unnamed woman had seen her son Geraldo in Macky, so the café owner sees his own son, Jojo, in the child. Significantly, both Geraldo and Jojo are indirect or direct victims of US imperialism, whether in Central America or in Vietnam.[9] Just as the unnamed woman is a representation of La Llorona, so the café owner can qualify to be El Llorón, the symmetrical father figure that has lost his son. Thus the initial boundaries between café owner and unnamed woman reveal themselves as inherently permeable and blurry. But the appearance of the woman yields other possible continuity between host and guest/parasite. She is literally a parasite in the etymological sense of the word (*para*, beside; *sitos*, food), eating next to the cook, but she pays for the food like any other customer, to the cook's surprise. Furthermore, it is possible to say, as Derrida claimed, that the cook, as the owner of the place, is "in truth a *hôte* received in his own home". If Derrida claimed that the *hôte* as host is a guest (Derrida 1999: 41), it seems possible to add that the *hôte* as host is a parasite. His parasitical practices have to do with the food he offers, advertised as "the best prices on double-burger deluxes this side of Main Street", but revealed as not pure beef. The owner as host is parasitizing his guests. This revelation at the micro level is consistent with the notion of the parasitical nation and the immigrant host. This is Inda's conclusion when he claims that the nation-state is like a parasite that is dependent on migrants for its own prosperity (2000: 52). This doubling is reinforced by the fact that "host" is a divided term that contains the antithetical relation of host and guest (Miller 1979: 55).

In contrast to the drawing of clear-cut distinctions and antinomies, between the chaser and the chased, hosts and guests/parasites, order and disorder, the story takes the reader to the realm of fuzziness, noise, and what Serres calls "the mortal face of mixtures" (2007: 87). The unnamed woman, as the uninvited guest, creates a new complexity that problematizes the relationship between a country and its immigrants/parasites. The story seems to claim that interdependence between a country and its guests/parasites is far more complex than is frequently acknowledged and represented. Maybe the nation-state and its immigrants are at once host and parasite to each other (Inda 2000: 58); maybe the immigrant/parasite inhabits the host nation and the parasitic nation inhabits the host immigrant (2000: 58); maybe the parasitical nation invaded the parasitic immigrant's country through political or armed intervention, and set migrants on their way to the United States, as Jelloun suggests. What seems clear is that chaos and noise permeate any attempt at order-making in the story. Viramontes seems to drag characters and readers into the fuzziness of her writing. Just as there are no stable categories in the story, so the division into sections seems impossible to maintain. Like the characters themselves, readers are dragged into the realm of fuzzy and thence into the mortal fate of mixtures.

Notes

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[2]. See Trump's statements on immigration during the 2016 Presidential campaign: <http://www.ontheissues.org/2016/Donald_Trump_Immigration.htm>.

[3]. See, for example, Piri Thomas's *Down These Mean Streets* (1967), Karen T. Yamashita's *I Hotel* (2010), Miné Okubo's *Citizen 13660* (1946), Quiñonez's *Chango's Fire* (2004), to name only a few.

[4]. However, the owner of the café is almost as much of a victim as are the undocumented workers he calls "scum" (Saldívar-Hull 1991: 218).

[5]. See Ana María Manzanas and Jesús Benito (2017: 138).

[6]. The European Commission states that "Asylum is granted to people fleeing persecution or serious harm in their own country and therefore in need of international protection. Asylum is a fundamental right; granting it is an international obligation, first recognised in the 1951 Geneva Convention on the protection of refugees" (<http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/home-affairs/what-we-do/policies/asylum/index_en.htm>). Although the European Commission talks about the moral

imperative to welcome refugees, it continues to "build up a security apparatus that will provide oversight and total control over population influxes towards and from the external borders of the union" (Fotiadis 2015). What may seem as a failure, however, is just a policy consistent with the commission's strategic priorities on immigration and border control policies (Fotiadis 2015).

[7]. In France on February 4th, 1997, Jacqueline Deltombe was found guilty of harboring a friend and her "undocumented" partner from Zaire. Acts of unofficial welcomings increased after Sangatte was closed and the migrants roamed around Calais. There were two more arrests in August 2005 when two teachers were accused of aiding an undocumented foreigner to stay in France, thus violating a clause in a law dating from 1945, and were prosecuted as if they were human traffickers. Similarly, two volunteers were accused of distributing food to 29 illegals (*clandestins*) in a squat near Dunkerque. Aiding these *clandestins* is a crime according to article 21 of the ordinance of November 2nd, 1945. The sentences were increased by the Sarkozy law of 2003. What in 1945 was a criminal act is now in danger of becoming an act of terrorism (Derrida 2001: 16).

[8]. The Iran-Contra affair was a covert foreign operation concerning two apparently unrelated countries, Nicaragua and Iran. The United States militarily supported the Contras against the Sandinistas at a time when Congress had cut off funds to the Contras. The money came from the selling of arms to Iran in Exchange for the release of American hostages in Lebanon. The profits from the arms sales were used to support the Nicaraguan Contras.

[9]. See Manzanas and Benito's *Cities, Borders and Spaces* (2011: 47).

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THE RHETORICS OF HOSPITALITY IN WALT WHITMAN'S *SPECIMEN DAYS*[1]

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Abstract

This article explores the concept of hospitality in Walt Whitman's *Specimen Days* (1882). The article is informed by a Levinasian reading of the concept since the main argument is that Lévinas' interpretation of hospitality sheds light on Whitman's years in Washington during the Civil War and his much debated relation with wounded soldiers. Lévinas' phenomenology is centered on care of the Other, which leads to the question of how far the self's personal obligation to respond to the other in need actually extends. Whitman wanted to create a persona that was meaningful and useful in the Civil War and he chose to be a nurse, or, as he called it in a poem, "the wound-dresser". By writing about the Civil War, he would both put himself in the center of the historical moment and support Lincoln's decision to fight the South. In *Specimen Days* he wanted to write a memorandum of the war that rejected the 'sanitized' versions already circulating. He focused on Union soldiers, who were representative of the best American qualities in Whitman's view and who endured the hardships of the war, the injuries, pain and death included, but he also described the Southern soldiers, who were the 'ghosts' of the Union during the Civil War.

Keywords: Walt Whitman, hospitality, *Specimen Days*, American Civil War, Emmanuel Lévinas.

Resumen

El artículo analiza el concepto de hospitalidad en el libro *Specimen Days* (1882) de Walt Whitman. Metodológicamente sigue la idea propuesta por Emmanuel Lévinas de hospitalidad como cuidado del otro, pues el autor cree que esa lectura levinasiana ayuda a entender algunos aspectos del tiempo que Whitman pasó en Washington durante la Guerra Civil. Su intención era crear un personaje que respondiera a las necesidades de dicha guerra. De ahí que escoja ser un enfermero o "the wound-dresser". Al escribir sobre la Guerra Civil, se situó en el centro del momento y apoyó la decisión de Lincoln de atacar el Sur. Con *Specimen Days* el objetivo era escribir unas memorias de la guerra que fuera más allá de las versiones depuradas que ya circulaban. Se centró en los soldados de la Unión, representantes de los mejores valores americanos, según dejó dicho. Estos soldados soportaron lo peor de la guerra, las heridas, el dolor y la muerte; también escribió sobre los soldados sureños, a quienes vio como los 'fantasmas' de la Unión durante esos años.

Palabras clave: Walt Whitman, hospitalidad, *Specimen Days*, Guerra Civil americana, Emmanuel Lévinas.

Introduction

Hospitality is a term that appears in Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* as early as 1855. In the preface Whitman uses the word hospitality when writing about the greatest poet. "The premises of the prudence of life are not the hospitality of it or the ripeness and harvest of it" (Kaplan 1982: 20). Whitman assumes that the reader knows the meaning of the term, and implies that the word does not carry any other particular connotation for him. The *Webster's Encyclopedic Unabridged Dictionary of the English Language* defines hospitality as "the friendly reception and treatment of guests or strangers" (*Webster's* 1971: 686). This friendly welcoming of strangers is also acknowledged in the text. Whitman mentions "the perpetual coming of immigrants" (Kaplan 1982: 8) in the context of the poet's responsibilities. Among these, Whitman alludes to the concept of hospitality when he writes: "Of them a bard is to be commensurate with a people. To him the other continents arrive as contributions… he gives them reception for their sake and his own sake" (Kaplan 1982: 7). A few years later he wrote about the hospitality of the American language in "Rambles Among Words" (1859). In the twelfth Ramble, he considers the theory of America: "Land of Ensemble, to her the consenting currents flow, and the ethnology of the States draws the grand outline of the hospitality and reception that must mark the new politics, sociology, literature and religion" (Grier 1984: 1661). A few lines later, he adds "Language […] moulded

more and more to a large hospitality and impartiality" (Grier 1984: 1661). The linguistic sign would be meaningless for Whitman if it were not for its capacity to welcome and embrace new objects and thoughts since this language is created in order to name objects and thoughts that were before then still unnamed. Language also functions as a container for those new thoughts but if it was to be creative it would be so only by means of its hospitality. Hospitality, then, is a central feature of Whitman's poetics and deserves more attention. Puspa Damai (2012: 27-67) and Ana Manzanas and Jesús Benito (2017: 28-36) have partially studied hospitality in Whitman's poetry. However, none of them has fully explored the centrality of hospitality to Whitman's poetics. I propose to study the importance of hospitality in *Specimen Days*, Whitman's troubling autobiography. The issue poses some questions that are central to an understanding of Whitman's late works. Whitman claimed in "A Backward Glance O'er Travel'd Roads" that without the Civil War he would not have written *Leaves of Grass* (Kaplan 1982: 666). Since *Specimen Days* relates his experience during the war, it is necessary to inquire to what extent hospitality centered Whitman's late poetics and how it created a rhetoric of its own in his work.

My reading of Whitman's hospitality in *Specimen Days* will be informed by the Levinasian conceptualization of hospitality. It is my view that despite the fact that Lévinas is a post-Holocaust philosopher whose writings are basically concerned with an ethical understanding of society (Plant 2003: 436), his interpretation of hospitality sheds light on Whitman's years in Washington during the Civil War and his much debated relation with wounded soldiers. For Lévinas, hospitality is the welcoming of the Other as the stranger. He notes that the welcoming "comes from the exterior" (1969: 51) and produces an epiphany in which the face is the central element. This epiphany signals the very moment in which inwardness and outwardness meet. The outwardness of the Other's face meets the interiority of the self, and calls into question the subject's uniqueness and possession of the world, according to Lévinas' theory in different parts of *Totality and Infinity*. The epiphany has as its main consequence the breaking of stable categories such as the self, the Other or inwardness and outwardness, since this epiphany "overflows images" (1969: 51) and breaks through any preconception (1969: 297). The home is a site of inwardness for Lévinas that, nonetheless, is rootless because the individual ventures outside his inwardness. This venturing outside makes hospitality possible as the individual becomes an ethical subject by means of recollection, which is a kind of "coming to oneself, a retreat home with oneself as in a land of refuge, which answers to a hospitality, an expectancy, a human welcome" (1969: 155). It makes the welcoming of the Other possible (1969: 155). Thus, when the subject becomes ethical, the 'I' becomes "the non-interchangeable par excellence" and the state of being becomes a hostage (1998: 177). For Lévinas, only the

hostage can experience pity, compassion and proximity (1998: 177) while welcoming the Other at the same time. This welcome becomes a type of hospitality in the view of Derrida, who says that Lévinas' hospitality is "not simply some region of ethics […] it is ethicity itself, the whole and the principle of ethics" (1999: 50).

As Clive Barnett states, Lévinas' phenomenology is centered on care, which leads to the question of how far the self's personal obligation to respond to the other in need actually extends (2005: 6). He also asserts that "Lévinas' work places considerable emphasis upon the ethical primacy of relations of proximity" (2005: 6). Both assertions pose the issue of proximity/distance not only in geographical terms, which is Barnett's main concern, but also in terms of kinship and belonging to the same community. In the Civil War hospitality was not just a matter of physical but also of communal proximity. In this sense the Levinasian notion of home would cover other places such as hospitals, as I discuss later. The question that readers should ask (and that probably Whitman himself asked) is whether hospitality went beyond his care for Union soldiers, or whether the Union was the limit that would define the subjectivity of care.

The limits of hospitality would point to the notion of the ghost. For Whitman this ghost would be the Southern soldier. He would be a presence that could not be acknowledged or even named. Lévinas himself claims that "we remain forever accused, with a bad conscience" since, Plant argues, the 'ghosts' of the Holocaust "emerge from the nazi death camps of the 1940s" (2003: 436) and haunt Lévinas' writings (Lévinas 1984: 63-64). In the Civil War the 'ghosts' were the Southern soldiers, and the Southern prisons would be the ghostly sites. These would show the ideals of democracy and national union in a different light. Whitman was well aware that his memoir of the Civil War would remain incomplete if he did not devote some chapters of his autobiography to the Southern troops. Again the reader may wonder if Whitman wanted to reestablish a Union that went beyond political sectionalism. In the end the individual's subjectivity is the final tenet in establishing the limits of hospitality as Lévinas himself concedes in his essay *Totality and Infinity* (1969: 27).

Ciro Augusto Floriani and Fermin Roland Schramm have delved into the relationship between hospitality and hospitals (2010). They analyze the etymology of the Latin word *hospes* to conclude that it initially meant 'host' and became 'stranger' with its Christian use in the fourth century. *Hospitalis* originated *hospitalitas* that meant both hospitality and the condition of the stranger and was also the lexical root of words such as hospital, hostel, hostelry, hotel and hospice (2010: 216). Both hospital and hospitality have the same root and both share the ethos of protection, home, den or shelter (2010: 216). If we now return to Lévinas' concept of hospitality as care, it is

clear that the relation between a person offering care and another receiving it embraces both hospitality and the function of hospitals. It is my contention that Whitman had in mind this sense of the term. Whitman arrived in Washington searching for his brother and after he had spent a few days at the front, he was fairly familiar with the direst consequences of the war. Once he saw that his brother was alive, he decided to stay in Washington in order to help and adopted the role of nurse to provide care to wounded soldiers. As he recalled in "The Wound-Dresser": "I thread my way through the hospitals,/ The hurt and wounded I pacify with soothing hand,/ I sit by the restless all the dark night" (Kaplan 1982: 445).

In this context the issue of Whitman's relation towards the wounded soldiers acquires a new sense. Whitman's homoeroticism comes to the front when dealing with the soldiers. For instance, Michael Moon argues that Whitman "could express his homoerotic desires with any degree of fullness, as he nursed and befriended dozens of other men which permitted […] that he share with them a whole range of otherwise largely proscribed kinds of emotional intimacies" (1991: 210-11). Katherine Kinney resumes Moon's argument and admits that Whitman's handling of wounded soldiers and his depiction of them in his work "have posed a critical crux for understanding the poet of the body and of the Union" (1996: 174). She accepts that Moon's interpretation of Whitman's depiction of the wounded bodies is uncanny, in the Freudian sense, for readers (1996: 173). This uncanny condition makes a sexualized reading of Whitman's years in the hospitals in Washington problematic. Jerome Loving points out that Whitman "came to view his role as a 'hospital missionary' as a sacred undertaking" (1999: 262). However, Whitman wrote letters which seem to have embarrassed the soldiers he took care of. For instance, there is the letter he wrote to Thomas P. Sawyer on April, 21, 1863 (Miller 1961: 90-93). It reads like a letter from a friend until Whitman shifts the tone at the end to make an explicit declaration of his desire for Sawyer and himself to live together. As Edward H. Miller writes in a footnote, "Always WW was both an anxious father-figure and an ardent comrade desirous of establishing permanent ties with soldiers whom he had known and nursed in Washington hospitals" (Miller 1961: 90). There is little doubt that in some cases Whitman felt an attachment that went beyond his job as a nurse. What is not so clear is whether that was the only, or the main, reason why he undertook such work during the Civil War since it is well known that his primary interest when he first went to the scene of the Civil War was to have news of his brother (Miller 1961: 89-90).

My contention is that Whitman stayed in Washington with the sole aim of helping wounded soldiers. This was possible because at the time of the Civil War nursing was not a job as professionalized as it became later and any person willing to help could join a hospital (McPherson 1990: 477-480; Sheeny 2007: 555-563). It is necessary

to notice that when Whitman arrived in Washington after having good news of his brother George, he had to look for a means of subsistence, which he found in raising funds and in journalism, since he was not paid by the federal government or any other government agency, or even by the hospitals (Buinicki 2014: 135-157).

1. Washington D.C.: The City of Hospitals

At that time Washington was a city that was still being built. It had been negotiated as the site of government by different political factions despite being in the middle of nowhere (Plumly 2012: 13). By the end of the war the city had changed significantly and had tripled its population (Price 2014: 121). In *Specimen Days*, Whitman recounts his visits to the hospitals of the city, namely the Patent-Office hospital, the Armory hospital and the Campbell hospital, plus others he does not name (Kaplan 1982: 714). He also mentions his nightly walks near the White House (Kaplan 1982: 718). Interestingly, he evokes these rambles in a poetic vein, leaving aside the description of buildings and streets and focusing on the atmosphere that the moonlight creates:

> everything so white, so marbly pure and dazzling, yet soft —the White House of future poems, and of dreams and dramas, there in the soft and copious moon— the gorgeous front, in the trees under the lustrous flooding moon, full of reality, full of illusion (Kaplan 1982: 718),

and

> The night was sweet, very clear, sufficiently cool, a voluptuous half-moon, slightly golden, the space near it of a transparent blue-gray tinge […] Somehow it look'd rebukefully strong, majestic, there in the delicate moonlight. (Kaplan 1982: 738)

This is a very far-from-reality picture that might be contrasted with Loving's description of the city in Whitman's biography, "When the streets of Washington weren't mud, they gave off immense amounts of dust. The city's foul-smelling canal […] hosted malaria, and hospitals contended with typhoid poisoning and diarrhea because of an irregularly clean water supply" (Loving 1999: 263).

For a poet such as Whitman, familiar with the styles of contemporary poetry as well as that of the past, both American and British, his evocation of a picturesque scene is intentional. He had already written about the modern city before the Civil War. Unlike British poets such as William Wordsworth, Matthew Arnold, Arthur H. Clough or Alfred Tennyson, Whitman saw the city as a suitable topic for poetry, and "hospitable to the poetic sensibility" (Beach 1996: 115). He did not find his models in poetry but in novels, Beach claims (1996: 117). He certainly created a powerful image of New York as a modern metropolis. This makes his description

of Washington in *Specimen Days* even more unexpected. The explanation lies in Whitman's desire to be accepted as a poet and the consequent use of more conventional poetic forms and tropes in a late stage of his career, as Price discusses in *Whitman and Tradition* (1990: 73-74). Whereas during his early years Whitman had dismissed the work of poets such as Tennyson, by the 1860s he felt increasingly attracted to them due to his wish to widen his own readership and be accepted as a poet. However, it is my view that there is a political poetics underlying this description. In the first excerpt the words "dreams" and "illusion" point to a sense of unreality. The city of hospitals is transformed during the night and it belongs to the realm of fantasy. It becomes a site in which daily dramas disappear. In these scenes the poet walks alone and during his rambles creates a picturesque and aestheticized scenario that ignores the Civil War. At night Washington becomes the site of a reality that transcends the tribulations of the hospitals.

2. Hospitals as Rhetorical Spaces: The Rhetorics of Aesthetic Democracy

Whitman created the sort of rhetorical space that Elizabethada A. Wright describes in "Rhetorical Spaces in Memorial Places: The Cemetery as a Rhetorical Memory Place/Space" (2005: 51-81). Following Pierre Nora, Wright defines the memory place (lieu de memoir) as the space representing "the concrete realization of the abstract memory" (2005: 52) in a way that not only makes it everlasting but also meaningful. Such a place exists in real life but meaning is only attained through a process of rhetorical construction, i.e., the discourse, the speakers, the characters, or persons that the place includes. All these elements convey a meaning that goes beyond the mere place and makes it a site of memory.

In Washington, then, Whitman centers his autobiography on his visits to hospitals. He writes that in the three years that he was in Washington, he visited, "counting all, among from eighty thousand to a hundred thousand of wounded and sick […]. These visits varied from an hour or two, to all day and night" (Kaplan 1982: 775). It should be noted that, when Whitman talks of hospitals he does not write only about the grand federal buildings, he also means tents, wards in churches and schools. In total there were over 40 in Washington, and he visited them all (Roberts 2005). As Paul Zweig affirms:

> It is clear that the hospitals were vital places for Whitman. During four years, he rarely missed a day, with his knapsack full of gifts and his florid fatherliness. Even when the war was over, and the country labored to forget its four years' ordeal, Whitman went on visiting the chronic cases that lingered in a few outlying hospitals. He thrived as a bringer of comfort. (1985: 154)

The hospital became the site where he would comfort wounded soldiers, people who were strangers to him, yet who shared a commitment to a return to the national unity previous to the war. He would spend his days among soldiers, offering them relief from their pains and sorrows and would make no distinction between the different types of hospitals that had been set up. The differences between the Patent Office and the tents that served as hospitals were disregarded by Whitman in his role of comforter. This, however, was not an easy task, as Wry argues: "Wartime hospitals are liminal spaces for the wounded who either pass from life to death within their walls, or (less frequently) emerge stabilized or healed" (2009: 202). They would be places of recovery, rebirth, but also sites of mourning and of memory depending on the occasion. The instability that had turned them into liminal spaces would mark life as a process in which all that seemed slightly stable could change radically in a few hours' time.

In this sense, Whitman's insistence on the soldiers as a suffering but also an enduring people, his many visits to hospitals, and his role as comforter, helper or giver of small gifts, create a place that is a memorial densely occupied by Whitman himself. He creates an ambiguous rhetorical place in which his voice directs the readers' attention while giving presence, though not voice, to the soldiers. Despite his custom of going to hospitals carrying a notebook and a pencil, he never quotes the exact words that soldiers uttered, subordinating the soldiers' voices to his own and generating a place that is his sole creation.

3. The "Wound-Dresser", Soldiers and the Rhetorics of Hospitality

As part of the rhetoric of aesthetic democracy, Whitman would place himself in the role of the "wound-dresser" as he wrote in *Drum-Taps* (Kaplan 1982: 442-445). This role would not differ much from that of the poet as expressed by Ralph W. Emerson in "The Poet" (Porte 1983: 445-468), a role which was gladly accepted and adopted by Whitman in the 1855 "Preface". In the hospitals he found this new role that he could perform to help other people and bring them some comfort in a moment when his career as the American poet had not developed as he had anticipated in his early years. To make possible his new role, Whitman broadens the function of hospitals by focusing on his role as a nurse who helps soldiers during their hospital stay. Whitman is well aware of his role: "I found it was the simple matter of personal presence, and emanating ordinary cheer and magnetism, that I succeeded and help'd more than by medical nursing" (Kaplan 1982: 727). In several chapters of the book he details his tasks as those of letter-writer, talkative companion, generous provider of cigarettes and other sundry objects. Whitman

constructs his persona in *Specimen Days* as the wound-dresser, a role that he kept in *Drum-Taps*. At the same time he never stops mentioning soldiers who have had limbs amputated (Kaplan 1982: 745). This new role helped him to "revaluate everything he had ever thought or written about America" (Ignoffo 1975: 2) or, as he himself put it in "A Backward Glance O'er Travel'd Roads", "[w]ithout those three or four years and the experiences they gave, *Leaves of Grass* would not now be existing" (Kaplan 1982: 666).[2] Looking at Whitman's role during the Civil War as a person who gives care and comfort to wounded people and who does not ask for anything in return, all the while never paying attention to the provenance of soldiers, it is correct to deduce that he was offering hospitality to wounded soldiers in a city, Washington, that, at first sight, was inhospitable. However it should also be emphasized that Whitman was performing a role that he intended to use as a comforter of wounded soldiers in a moment when his career as the American poet seemed to have reached a dead end.

Whitman's focusing on hospitals, wounded soldiers and himself as the center around which everything revolved was also meant to create a chronicle of war different from other contemporary war memoirs. Brian Jordan argues that from the beginning there were "sanitized" versions of the war, demanded by a readership that did not want to know the true consequences of the conflict (2011: 123). The segment of the Civil War in *Specimen Days* was first published as *Memoranda During the War* and this was intended, Daneen Wardrop argues, as a nursing narrative, a very common subgenre in the period (2005: 26). Whitman expanded on the nursing narrative style (2005: 27) and made particular use of the subgenre in the sense that he did not simply wish to describe his involvement with the patients. He wanted to show both the bright and the dark side of the Civil War and to express his understanding of hospitality. While writing about wounded soldiers Whitman was, in fact, revealing the bright side. He was describing people who did not know each other, whose provenance and background were extremely varied but who nonetheless had joined the common cause of the Union: "Down in the abysms of New World humanity there had form'd and harden'd a primal hard-pan of national Union will, determined and in the majority" (Kaplan 1982: 707). It was, as he wrote immediately afterwards: "the best lesson of the century, or of America" (Kaplan 1982: 707).

As regards soldiers, Whitman mentions both Union and Southern troops. Most of them are rank and file soldiers from the Union army who come wounded from the battlefield to be healed, both physically and psychologically. For Whitman this Union soldier is the representative of America. He contemplates a column of soldiers moving through the night and writes: "I never before realized the majesty and reality of the American people *en masse*" (Kaplan 1982: 740). Some pages

before he had written, "[l]ook at the patient and mute manner of our American wounded as they lie in such a sad collection; representatives from all New England, and from New York, and New Jersey, and Pennsylvania —indeed from all the states and all the cities— largely from the west" (Kaplan 1982: 719). Synecdoche is the rhetorical figure Whitman is using here. A few men represent the whole of America, properly speaking the whole Union, men who are not officials but rank and file soldiers. This is in accord with what the poet had written in the "Preface" to *Leaves of Grass*: "the genius of the United States is not best or most in its executives or legislatures, nor in its ambassadors or authors or colleges or churches or parlors, nor even in its newspapers or inventors… but always most in the common people" (Kaplan 1982: 5-6). As Jason Frank argues, Whitman "turned away from institutions to an unmediated understanding of the people as the only reliable source of democratic regeneration" (2007: 406). This attitude was one of the two ways in which he responded to the political crisis of his age, the other being a broad understanding of literature as a political medium. By merging both responses Whitman created his "aesthetic democracy" (Frank 2007: 406). In any case the initial creation of the figure of the common people and then, years later, of the soldiers as representatives of America points to a rhetorical construction of characters by means of synecdoche.

By focusing on amputees and badly wounded soldiers, most of whom died some weeks after entering hospital, Whitman is creating a site of disability, mourning and memory. As Stephen Kuusisto argues, "the poet's prose reveals Whitman's new and profound appreciation for the literal suffering of men" (2005: 157). Whitman gradually paid more attention to disability in his notebooks (2005: 158). For Whitman the war was not something grandiose, it was primarily represented by these amputees and wounded soldiers, and their physical suffering. As he wrote in "An Army Hospital Ward": "You may hear groans or other sounds of unendurable suffering from two or three of the cots, but in the main there is quiet —almost a painful absence of demonstration; but the pallid face, the dull'd eye, and the moisture on the lip, are demonstrations enough" (Kaplan 1982: 719). This section comes just after "The White House in Moonlight", in which he had described the Washington night as picturesque and, as it were, lyrical. By juxtaposing sections with a different intent, Whitman creates a written collage of contrasts that emphasizes the brutality of the war. In the end, his aim is to describe Washington as a town of wounded soldiers: "That little town [Washington] […] is indeed a town, but of wounds, sickness, and death" (Kaplan 1982: 737).

As stated before, hospitality has a spectral side to it. As Plant writes about Lévinas, "the other 'haunts our ontological existence'" (2003: 436) and Whitman's attitude towards Southern soldiers deserves detailed attention. The other is the self that is not

me while at the same time is my mirror image. Although we cannot say that the other is radically different from me, neither can we easily accept that the other and I share characteristics that bind us together. That is the reason why Whitman's acknowledgement of the Southern soldiers' humanity and his hospitable behavior towards them is textually necessary. Though he gives more space to Union soldiers in *Specimen Days*, the appearance of Southerners in the book reveals that Whitman needed these soldiers to contrast Union and Secessionist attitudes towards the troops.

He first introduces the Southern forces in negative terms: "In a few hours —perhaps before the next meal— the secesh generals, with their victorious hordes, will be upon us" (Kaplan 1982: 710). The use of *secesh* and *hordes* points to the barbaric aspect of the war, but it also reinforces the idea that the Union had simply done what was right. In a very specific way *hordes* opposes the *people en masse* that Whitman would mention in "Down at the Front" (Kaplan 1982: 740), and also the Union soldiers Whitman describes only a few paragraphs before under the same epigraph: "Washington gets all over motley with these defeated soldiers —queer-looking objects, strange eyes and faces, drench'd (the steady rain drizzles on all day) and fearfully worn, hungry, haggard, blister'd in the feet" (Kaplan 1982: 709).

It is no mere coincidence that Union and rebel soldiers appear in the same chapter and that their descriptions are so dissimilar. In fact, rebel soldiers are not described properly speaking; they are simply mentioned by using a noun that is ideologically charged. The rebel soldiers gather at the entrance to Washington as the Northern barbarians were at the gates of Rome. This creates the notion that the Southerners are the invaders while the Union soldiers remain in their land despite the fact that Washington is in the south of the United States and next to the secessionist State of Virginia. This rhetorical construction of the enemy as someone who lives outside the national frontiers helps Whitman create a hospitable persona for himself. In one of the first encounters in a camp hospital, soldiers asked him for paper, which he gave them (Kaplan 1982: 712). He also mentions a "good secesh" who helped a Union soldier in the battlefield (Kaplan 1982: 715) and in the chapter "A Secesh Brave" he even acknowledges that noble soldiers may be found on both sides in the war (Kaplan 1982: 720). This radical shift from his first description of Southern soldiers as a *horde* suggests that Whitman changed his view on the rebels and that his notion of hospitality became more inclusive as time passed by since he helped soldiers on the side that was attacking the Union, or in other words, troops who were destroying the American experiment that Whitman had celebrated in his poetry.

The contrast with his comments about Union soldiers is striking. First, Whitman gives his opinion openly when writing about Union soldiers: "It is, indeed, the

best lesson of the century, or of America, and it is a mighty privilege to have been part of it" (Kaplan 1982: 707). It cannot pass unnoticed that Whitman considered himself as a member of the group of Unionists who fought to keep the United States bound together. It should also be noticed that the terms *century* and *America* are equated as if Whitman was implying that the nineteenth century was the century of America and the best feats in the world had been American.

Whitman's description of Union soldiers in Washington after the Battle of Bull Run contrasts more vividly with his description of Southern soldiers, though this is not due to the Unionists' happiness or better appearance. In fact, they are described as "defeated soldiers —queer-looking objects, strange eyes and faces, drench'd (the steady rain drizzles on all day) and fearfully worn, hungry haggard, blister'd in the feet" (Kaplan 1982: 709). What makes the difference is the response of the Americans in Washington. These Americans, Unionists, react steadily when they hear about the defeat of the Union army: "Good people (but not over-many of them either,) hurry up something for their grub. They put wash-kettles on the fire, for soup, for coffee. They set tables on side-walks" (Kaplan 1982: 709). The comparison between the way Union and Southern soldiers are treated in Washington is problematic. Nobody would expect different behavior from Washingtonians for two reasons. The first is that Washington was already the capital of the United States and was on the Unionist side. The second is that the description of Union soldiers was made at the beginning of the war, July 1861, while the portrayal of the rebel soldiers dates from the end of the period, February 1865. A few pages later, the contrast is present again in the procession of Southern escapees. When mentioning them, he writes: "still it was a procession of misery" (Kaplan 1982: 755) as the final words of a longer description. Then he adds that he saw these processions every day and that the government did its best to help them, sending them north and west (Kaplan 1982: 755).

Though in different segments of the book Whitman mentions troops who came from the West with the sole aim of emphasizing that nationality consists "in the specifically affective attachments that somehow tie together people who have never seen one another, who live in different climates, come from different cultures, and harbor wildly different needs and aspirations" (Coviello 2001: 87), it is the Southern soldier who provides a contrast and defines the limits of hospitality. Whitman needs to go a step beyond his allegiance to the Union and include these soldiers, though he subtly marks the difference between both sides. The Southern soldiers are accepted as members of the Union once again but there are slight divergences between both sides. The Other haunts Whitman's ontological existence and though he wants to bridge the gap between both

armies, he still feels these dissimilarities. In any case, Whitman, though a clear Unionist, tries to understand Southern soldiers and, most importantly, remarks that the war is a fight between brothers. Close to the end of the second part of *Specimen Days*, Whitman writes about two brothers who enlisted in the Southern and the Union armies respectively. He concludes: "It was in the same battle both were hit. One was a strong Unionist, the other Secesh; both fought on their respective sides, both badly wounded, and both brought together here after a separation of four years. Each died for his cause" (Kaplan 1982: 771). This final statement dissolves all previous reservations Whitman might have had regarding Southern soldiers.

However, the greatest contrast is between Union hospitals and Southern prisons. In his descriptions of the hospitals in Washington, Whitman offers a view of comradeship and of himself as caregiver to the wounded soldiers, Southern soldiers included. When almost at the end of the Civil War section of *Specimen Days*, Whitman considers Union troops who had been prisoners in the South, his tone changes radically. While in his descriptions of wounded soldiers, comradeship and kindness prevail, in the chapter devoted to Union prisoners the tone moves towards wrath. His picture of these soldiers is revealing when compared to that of the wounded soldiers. Of the prisoners Whitman writes: "The sight is worse than any sight of battle-fields, or any collection of wounded, even the bloodiest", to add a few lines later, "are they really not mummied, dwindled corpses? They lay there, most of them, quite still, but with a horrible look in their eyes and skinny lips (often enough not enough flesh on the lips to cover their teeth)" (Kaplan 1982: 765).

Even though his descriptions of the wounded do not turn away from the suffering they endure, he also emphasizes the epic side of the war in his description of the prisoners, who resemble corpses that have a horrible look. He then continues by mentioning, as the cause of their horrible looks, that they were not given any food and were close to dying of starvation. To the list of offences, Whitman adds the Southerners' behavior: "An indescribable meanness, tyranny, aggravating course of insults […] The dead there are not to be pitied as much as some of the living that come from there" (Kaplan 1982: 765-766). Whitman also includes a review of a book about Southern prisons published in *Toledo Blade*, and a letter on the same topic published in the *New York Tribune*. The review is, as might be expected, a harsh and sour account of the Union prisoners' experience in those prisons. Whitman includes both texts with the aim of stressing the differences between the North and the South in terms of hospitality. While he himself took care of both Union and Southern soldiers, Southern officials did not provide Union soldiers in hospitals with any type of

medical treatment according to Whitman's account of the story. His depiction of Southern prisons is the dark reverse of Northern hospitality and is reinforced by his not mentioning any Southern hospital in order to make a harsher contrast with the North. This absence of mention of Southern hospitals in the text is meant to highlight the bright image of the North in terms both of hospitality and of politics.

Conclusion

A Levinasian reading of Whitman's concern with hospitality during the Civil War shows that the American poet was concerned above all with ethics as care. This reading demonstrates that the Other is offered care in hospitals as a substitute for the home in which he would be welcomed. Whitman creates a rhetoric of hospitality in *Specimen Days* that is a direct result of his unfailing support to the cause of the Union. He wanted to provide a different account of the war by making use of the subgenre of nursing narratives that was so popular in the period. In *Specimen Days* the soldier was both the representative of America and its ghost. For the first purpose, he focused on Union soldiers, who were representative of the best American qualities in Whitman's view and who endured the hardships of the war, the injuries, pain and death. On the other hand, his description of Southern prisons reveals the reverse of hospitality and, as such, become the antithesis of the Union. While in the Union wounded soldiers are healed, in the South union soldiers are imprisoned. Whitman's role as a nurse should be considered since he stands at the center of the scene in most chapters devoted to Washington hospitals. There is little doubt that he wanted to create a persona that was meaningful and useful in the Civil War and he chose to be a nurse. Assuming that role, i.e., taking care of soldiers, comforting them, writing letters for them, giving them small gifts, he managed to convey meaning to his new role as the American poet.

Notes

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[2]. "A Backward Glance O'er Travel'd Roads" is the epilogue that Whitman appended to the 1889 edition of *Leaves of Grass*. Previously it had served as a preface to *November Boughs,* published in 1888.

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SPECTRALITY IN MARGARET ATWOOD'S "DEATH BY LANDSCAPE" (1990)

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Abstract

This article explores how Margaret Atwood engages with the literary trope of spectrality through the ghost of Lucy in "Death by Landscape" (1990), an enigmatic short story which can be fruitfully analyzed in the light of both the author's critical writings and the spectropoetics introduced by Jacques Derrida. As an outstanding example of the Canadian Gothic, this brief narrative not only addresses the universal concerns of death and bereavement, but also raises more specific key issues, including present-day human relationships with the natural environment and the perception of geographical spaces as symbolic sites. Lucy's ghostly presence haunting Lois draws special attention to the noxious effects of the modern appropriation of Native-American cultures, a controversial topic illustrated by the Indian-themed summer camp where Lucy mysteriously disappears and by her naïve friend Lois's explicit desire "to be an Indian". Additionally, Atwood's short story evokes the physical displacement due to colonial expansion and recalls the ensuing social dislocation of the decimated Native populations, eventually almost erased from the actual and imaginary landscapes of North America.

Keywords: spectrality, ghost stories, Canadian Gothic, death, natural environment.

Resumen

En este artículo se explora cómo trata Margaret Atwood el tropo literario de la espectralidad mediante el fantasma de Lucy en "Death by Landscape" (1990), un enigmático relato breve que se puede analizar fructíferamente a la luz de los escritos críticos de la propia autora y de la espetropoética propuesta por Jacques Derrida. Ejemplo destacado del gótico canadiense, esta pequeña narración no solo aborda los problemas universales de la muerte y el duelo, sino también otras importantes cuestiones más específicas, tales como las relaciones actuales de los seres humanos con el medio ambiente y la percepción de los espacios geográficos como lugares simbólicos. La presencia fantasmal de Lucy que obsesiona a Lois resalta los efectos nocivos de la apropiación moderna de las culturas indígenas norteamericanas, un controvertido asunto ilustrado por el campamento veraniego de temática amerindia en el que Lucy desaparece misteriosamente y por el deseo de "ser una india" que manifiesta su ingenua amiga Lois. Además, el relato de Atwood evoca el desplazamiento físico debido a la expansión colonial y recuerda la ulterior dislocación social de las diezmadas poblaciones indígenas, finalmente casi borradas de los paisajes norteamericanos, tanto de los reales como de los imaginarios.

Palabras clave: espectralidad, relatos de fantasmas, gótico canadiense, muerte, medio ambiente.

1. Introduction: "Hordes of Ghosts"

Long before scholars began to analyze the complexities of Canadian textual spectrality in the light of the principles of Derridean hauntology or spectropoetics, in a 1977 essay Margaret Atwood forcefully rejected the oft-quoted paradoxical statement with which Earle Birney had concluded his poem "Can. Lit". (1962): "it's only by our lack of ghosts/ we're haunted" (Atwood 1982: 230). Back in 1836, while recording her experiences as an early settler in Upper Canada, Catharine Parr Traill had complained: "As to ghosts or spirits, they appear totally banished from Canada. This is too matter-of-fact country for such supernaturals to visit" (1836: 153). These are precisely the words echoed by Earle Birney in his 1962 satirical poem, first published under the title of "Canadian Literature", illustrating his perception of Canada as a ghostless void. Apart from being occasionally used in Canadian political discourse, Birney's famous lines about this supposed "lack of ghosts" have been recurrently cited when trying to define the literature of the country and its cultural background. For instance, J.M. Kertzer responded to Birney's "poetic barb" with the following assertion: "Unlike

America, Canada casts no heroic shadows, because our bland citizens lack the historical traumas and the responsive imagination to expose the dreams on which the nation was built or to name its presiding ghost" (1991: 71).

Atwood, who would later include the full text of Birney's poem —consisting of four quatrains devoid of any punctuation marks— when she edited the anthology *The New Oxford Book of Canadian Verse in English*, had quoted its last two stanzas in her 1977 essay, entitled "Canadian Monsters: Some Aspects of the Supernatural in Canadian Fiction":

> we French & English, never lost
> our civil war
> endure it still
> a bloodless civil bore
>
> the wounded sirened off
> no Whitman wanted
> it's only by our lack of ghosts
> we're haunted (1982: 230)

In the same essay Atwood had also quoted the two initial stanzas from Irving Layton's poem "From Colony to Nation", first published in 1956, which carried a similar deploring tone and conveyed an equally pessimistic view of the Canadian literary scene (1982: 231). Firmly denying that Canada had ever been ghostless, she devoted the rest of her essay to examining a number of examples to support her basic contention.

Once again, when Atwood delivered her 1991 Clarendon lectures at Oxford University, she reiterated her position regarding the prominent role of ghosts in the literature of her country and firmly stated: "Hordes of ghosts and related creatures populate Canadian fiction and poetry" (1995: 63). Moreover, she argued: "Birney's 'lack of ghosts' line is even less true of that non-physical border, that imaginative frontier, where the imported European imagination meets and crosses with the Native indigenous one" (1995: 64). By that time her country's emergent spectral literature had already been enriched by the works of writers such as Robertson Davies, who was equally exasperated with Canada's alleged ghostlessness. In his introduction to *High Spirits: A Collection of Ghost Stories*, Davies identified himself as an avid reader of ghost tales and humorously contended: "Canada needs ghosts, as a dietary supplement, a vitamin taken to stave off that most dreadful of modern ailments, the Rational Rickets" (1982: 2). Atwood and other contemporary Canadian writers would actually meet that need by filling their works with the ghosts of their age because, as Jacques Derrida points out, "according to a historically determined scenography —every age has its ghosts" (2006: 149).

The prominence of the trope of haunting and spectrality in contemporary Canadian literature has been discussed by many scholars in the twenty-first century, including the contributors to the two special issues of *Mosaic* edited by Dawne McCance under the titles of *Haunting I: The Specter* (2001) and *Haunting II: Citations* (2002), the Spring 2006 issue of the *University of Toronto Quarterly*, edited by Marlene Goldman and Joanne Saul, and the special issue of *Ariel* edited by Pamela McCallum under the title of *Postcolonial Hauntings* (2006). Other relevant publications in this area are the collection of essays *Unsettled Remains: Canadian Literature and the Postcolonial Gothic* (2009), edited by Cynthia Sugars and Gerry Turcotte, Marlene Goldman's book *DisPossession: Haunting in Canadian Fiction* (2012), and *Canadian Gothic: Literature, History, and the Spectre of Self-Invention* (2014) by Cynthia Sugars. As I argued in my contribution to *The Cambridge History of Canadian Literature*, entitled "'Ghost Stories': Fictions of History and Myth":

> The "ghost history" that haunts Canadian literature in the post-1960s is the symbolic representation of those elements of the country's society that were previously barred from consciousness, and it is appropriate that revivals of the ghost story have been a preoccupation in contemporary Canadian criticism. (Gibert 2009: 478)

2. Ghosts Haunting the Wilderness and the Modern City

Apart from expressing admiration for the "ghost stories" (in the wide sense of the term) of other writers, including Emily Brontë and Toni Morrison, as well as critically analyzing and persuasively arguing against the once widely accepted notion that ghosts were absent from Canadian fiction and poetry, Atwood has made many notable contributions to the development of the literary trope of spectrality through her poems, novels and short stories. Throughout her cycle of poems collected in the volume *The Journals of Susanna Moodie* (1970), Atwood repeatedly invokes the ghost of Susanna Moodie, sister to Catharine Parr Traill, the woman who had regretted the absence of ghosts in the new colony and had yearned for their abundance such as there was in England, the native country of the two sisters, both of them authors of pioneer memoirs. Moodie had echoed her sister's claim when, "in the heart of a dark cedar swamp", she said to her husband that in England "superstition would people it with ghosts" and a Yankee settler who was with them in that "gloomy spot" replied: "There are no ghosts in Canada! […]. The country is too new for ghosts. No Canadian is afeard of Ghosts" (Moodie 1857: 137). Moodie concluded her argument with a prescient reflection which would resonate down the years to come: "The belief in ghosts, so prevalent in the old countries, must first have had its foundation in the consciousness of guilt" (1857: 137).

Atwood illustrated the first edition of *The Journals of Susanna Moodie* with six collages, all of them printed in black and white. The first collage of her book emphasizes the ghostlike quality which the poet wanted to convey when recreating the voice of Susanna Moodie, who appears with her hands high up superimposed on a dark forest and distinctly separated from it by a white border, generating the visual effect that a halo of light surrounds her whole body (Atwood 1970: 8). This opening illustration conveys the idea that Atwood saw the historical Moodie as someone completely alienated from the land, disconnected and isolated from her menacing surroundings. The alarming effect of this illustration successfully transmits the pioneer's feelings of fear and anxiety, which are verbalized both by Moodie throughout *Roughing It in the Bush* (1852) and by the speaker of Atwood's line: "The forest can still trick me" (1970: 15). In the afterword of *The Journals* Atwood makes some comments about the last poem of her collection which unequivocally confirm that Susanna Moodie becomes a ghost, "the spirit of the land she once hated", and haunts Canadians in a modern urban setting by making "her final appearance in the present, as an old woman on a Toronto bus who reveals the city as an unexplored, threatening wilderness" (1970: 64).

Aside from Moodie's ghost, Atwood has envisioned many other kinds of haunting by various sorts of historical and fictional spectral figures. For example, the temporarily insane protagonist of *Surfacing* (1972a) sees the ghosts of her lost parents in the northern wilderness of Quebec while she is searching for her father, who has been reported missing on an isolated island. This novel, which has been acclaimed as "an archetypal ghost story of Canadian Gothic wish-fulfilment" (Sugars 2014: 155), deserves to be taken into account. Yet, it seems more important to draw special attention to the ghost of Susanna Moodie before focusing on the ghost of Lucy in "Death by Landscape" (1990), a short story published twenty years after *The Journals*, because these two ghosts originate in the Canadian wilderness (both in its literal and figurative sense, that is, as a geographical space and as a symbolic site) and then move into the present in order to inhabit the modern city of Toronto. In Atwood's works, other ghosts also appear in contemporary urban Canadian settings, but unlike those of the historical Susanna Moodie in *The Journals* and the fictional Lucy in "Death by Landscape", they are completely unrelated to the Canadian natural milieu. Two such ghosts are spectral soldiers whose appearance stems from episodes related to military conflicts in foreign countries, the Vietnam War and the Second World War. They haunt the protagonists of the short stories entitled "The Man from Mars" (1977, in Atwood 1989) and "Uncles" (1990, in Atwood 1991), two young Canadian women who never resided in a battleground area, but who are traumatized by warfare and consequently project their psychic anxieties onto the images of soldiers by whom they feel emotionally threatened (Gibert 2018: 91, 95). The use of the ghost motif

as exemplified in these three short narratives as well as in *Surfacing* allows the interpretation of these ghosts as belonging to the kind most admired by Atwood, the Henry James kind. As she observed while discussing *Surfacing* in an interview conducted in 1972, "There are various kinds of ghosts you can see. [… Y]ou can have the Henry James kind, in which the ghost that one sees is in fact a fragment of one's own self which has split off, and that to me is the most interesting kind, and that's obviously the tradition I'm working in" (Gibson 1973: 29).

3. Landscape that Kills

"Death by Landscape" was originally published in *Harper's Magazine* in 1990, and one year later it was collected in Atwood's volume of short stories entitled *Wilderness Tips* (1991: 107-129). Since then, it has attracted wide scholarly and popular attention, and has become one of the most successful stories in the book, both with literary critics and the general public. Some book chapters and journal essays written about this short story focus on it almost exclusively (Hammill 2003; Raschke 2012; Rocard 1996; Vauthier 1993) whereas others analyze it in connection with one or more works by Atwood (Aurylaite 2005; Beyer 1996; Botta 2007; Howells 1996; Rule 2008; Wilson 2009/2010). Some of them deal with it in the wider context of Canadian literature (Mackey 2000) or the literature of other countries (Bruhn 2004; Shoemaker 1992). A number of scholars discuss "Death by Landscape" within *Wilderness Tips*, and thus tend to compare and contrast it with the rest of the stories included in this collection, which bears the title of one of them (Davidson 1996; Beran 2003; Bromberg 2006).

Those who approach this short narrative for the first time may be puzzled by its title, which is not the familiar "Death in a Landscape", but "Death by Landscape", a sequence recalling common phrases such as "Death by water" or "Death by fire". Atwood's title implies that landscape can actively kill, in other words, that it can be a malevolent monster which destroys people rather than a nurturing mother. Furthermore, Atwood's titling her short story "Death by Landscape" instead of "Death by Nature" deserves a word of mention. If "landscape" is understood as "all the visible features of an area of land, often considered in terms of their aesthetic appeal", it involves references to the visual perception of a physical space. On the other hand, if "landscape" is understood as "a picture representing an area of countryside", then it refers to the iconic representation of a physical space. In both cases, the polysemic word "landscape" denotes an additional dimension related to human intervention which is not inherent in the term "nature". Humans transform nature into landscape. The existence of some kind of human mediation in the term "landscape" implies that the type of death announced by the ambiguous

title of "Death by Landscape" cannot be exclusively caused by a deadly natural environment. It is not nature that kills, but landscape that kills. Thus, the enigmatic title of this short story signals a mystery expected to be unfolded.

Although "Death by Landscape" does not mean exactly the same as "Death by Nature", it is clear that the death-by-nature motif appears in the narrative. Atwood has discussed this literary motif extensively in her critical writings, starting with *Survival: A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature*, where she defined it as follows:

> Death by Nature [...] is an event of startling frequency in Canadian literature; in fact it seems to polish off far more people in literature than it does in real life. In Death by Nature, something in the natural environment murders the individual, though the author, who is of course the real guilty party [...] often disguises the foul deed to make it look like an accident. (1972b: 54-55)

In the essay "True North" (1987), included in her collection *Writing with Intent* (2005), Atwood established a close relationship between death and the landscape of the Canadian North. Granting that "one way of looking at a landscape is to consider the typical ways of dying in it", she mentioned among the hazards of the North: "death by blackfly", "death from starvation", "death by animal", "death by forest fire", "death from something called 'exposure'", "death by thunderstorm", "by lighting", "death by freezing and death by drowning" (2005: 39). This long list underscores the steady association of death with the Canadian northern landscape through numerous ill-fated encounters with the wilderness, but it does not encompass the specific kind of death evoked in "Death by Landscape".

Atwood has also explored the manifold aspects of this recurrent motif in the four Clarendon lectures collected in her volume *Strange Things: The Malevolent North in Canadian Literature* (1995), whose title is a quote from the opening line of "The Cremation of Sam McGee" (1907), a Robert W. Service poem about the Canadian North: "There are strange things done 'neath the midnight sun" (Atwood 1995: 3). It is in this book that Atwood provides her most comprehensive theoretical account of the mythic nature of the Canadian North, an often loosely-used term not restricted to "the high north" (the northern parts of Canada), but encompassing for southern Canadians "wilderness" [...] one of those emotionally charged concepts", as she noted in one of her interviews about *Wilderness Tips* (Kelly 1994: 156). The fact that Atwood delivered the Clarendon lectures in the spring of 1991, less than one year after the publication of "Death by Landscape" and coinciding with the publication of *Wilderness Tips*, encourages an interpretation of this short story in the light of *Strange Things*, where she presented to her foreign audience Canada as "North", a word whose elusive meaning did not go unnoticed by her most exacting reviewer (Wiebe 1996: 82).

4. "She Wanted to Be an Indian"

The first scene of "Death by Landscape" is set in the modern condominium apartment where Lois, a middle-aged woman, has moved now that she is a widow with grown-up sons. She prefers her luxurious apartment to her former large house, where she found it hard to cope with the lawn, the ivy and the squirrels. The first paragraph of the story reveals the protagonist's concern with safety and her desire to shut nature out of her apartment, in which she willingly confines herself. At present, apart from some potted plants in the solarium, the only reminders of the natural world in her urban milieu are the waterfront view of Lake Ontario she sees through the "knee-to-ceiling window" of her living room and the painted landscapes of the Canadian wilderness she has collected over the years. She acknowledges that she was compelled to buy these paintings, sketches and drawings by artists of the Group of Seven for no explainable reason (e.g. as fashionable wall art, or as the profitable art investments which they would eventually become). She acquired them with her husband's money just because she really "wanted something that was in them, although she could not have said at the time what it was. It was not peace: she does not find them peaceful in the least" (Atwood 1991: 110). Despite neither humans nor animals being shown in those paintings, she feels as if someone was looking at her from the pictures hanging on her walls. This comment draws our attention to a typical feature of the Group of Seven, whose members imbued their art with a spiritual or mythic dimension while they seldom included any human or animal figures. Furthermore, this remark indicates to what extent Lois is aware of how her favorite painters tended to refrain from incorporating any visible signs of human activity into their stark images, except for the occasional canoe or settler's cabin, but in some way managed to convey the impression of a haunted wilderness, a ghostly existence beyond the vegetable and the mineral worlds. The fact that looking at these pictures fills Lois "with a wordless unease" gives a first sign of the experience of the uncanny as defined by Freud in his famous 1919 essay, "that class of the frightening which leads back to what is known of old and long familiar" (1997: 217). This initial sign of the uncanny is to be followed by many others throughout Atwood's short story.

Immediately after this opening scene in the apartment crowded with landscape paintings, the setting moves to the actual region represented in them. Using Lois as the focalizer of the story, the third-person narrator flashbacks to the 1940s and recounts a traumatic event which had a crucial impact on her when she was thirteen and has deeply affected the rest of her life. The fateful incident was the mysterious disappearance of Lucy, her best friend, an American girl who vanished in the wilderness when both teenagers were at a summer camp in Northern Ontario. Since Lois was the last person to see and hear Lucy, she was interrogated and even

suspected of having pushed the girl off the sheer cliff they had climbed together on their own to reach a lookout point with a view over the lake. There are also hints that Lucy, who was particularly vulnerable because she had little experience of life in the woods and generally moved in a rather clumsy way, may have accidentally slipped. Or perhaps she committed suicide by jumping from the summit of the cliff into the lake, given that she was very unhappy after the divorce of her parents, disliked her stepfather, hated her new school and did not want to go back to her Chicago home, from which she had considered running away. She could have thought of suicide as an easy escape from suffering in a time of depression, when she was even "apathetic about the canoe trip", whereas Lois felt that she had "to disguise her own excitement" about it (Atwood 1991: 117). The enigma remains unsolved, however, because Lucy's body was never recovered, and the narrator, whose reliability may be challenged, claims to know nothing for certain. Readers are left to decide for themselves what might have happened.

Ever since that day, Lois was left with unresolved grief and a permanent sense of guilt. She spent years obsessed with remembering all the significant details of Lucy's disappearance again and again, in a continuous effort to understand what had happened, yet to no avail. Ultimately Lois comes to a point when she "has told her story so many times" that "she knows it word for word […] but she no longer believes it. It has become a story" (Atwood 1991: 126). Notwithstanding, she applies her reasoning skills to interpret her memories from the perspective of the knowledgeable adult she has become. For instance, now that she is acquainted with the current debates about cultural appropriation, she is conscious of the ominous implications of giving to that summer camp the name of Manitou, a term for a Supernatural Power or supernatural power in the abstract, according to Algonquian religious beliefs. To make matters even worse, the dining hall of the Indian-themed camp was presided over by Monty Manitou, "a sort of mascot" described in the story as "a huge moulting stuffed moose head, which looked somehow carnivorous" and supposedly "came to life in the dark" (1991: 112). Those two naming decisions were a double gaffe.

Additionally, Lois recalls with unease how every canoe expedition was "given a special send-off" in which the head of the summer camp (whose name was Cappie, alias Chief Cappeosota), the section leader and the counselors, all of them disguised as stereotypical Hollywood chiefs, would perform a mock ritual "to the sound of fake tom-toms" (Atwood 1991: 118). The girls were treated as if they were bloodthirsty boys when they were told by Chief Cappeosota, "Do good in war, my braves, and capture many scalps" just before each of them stood up, stepped forward and had "a red line drawn across her cheeks" by the head of the camp (118). In retrospect, Lois realizes the dangerous potential of staging that ceremony

before she and Lucy embarked with their group on a canoe trip which was apparently auspicious, but ended in tragedy. Lois has eventually learned that Natives "should not even be called Indians" and now she knows that "taking their names and dressing up like them" is actually "a form of stealing" (117), but at the time she did not consider that "playing Indian" could be offensive to anyone. The third-person narrator of the story, using Lois as the center of consciousness, justifies her girlish desire to turn herself into a Native: "It was not funny, it was not making fun. She wanted to be an Indian. She wanted to be adventurous and pure, and aboriginal" (118). At present, she reexamines her former naïve attitude, searching for clues about the ill fate of the girl who dared to enter a wild space in order to seek adventure and primeval purity, free from the taint of civilization, without realizing that such a space was doomed. While contending that "physical landscapes are crucial in a discussion of national identity and indigenous rights", Adam Shoemaker remarks that "the strangely discomforting atmosphere" of Atwood's short story "is strongly reminiscent of the mystery of Joan Lindsay's Australian novel *Picnic at Hanging Rock* in which school-age girls vanish into another dimension" (1992: 120). Professor Shoemaker, one of Australia's leader researchers in the area of Indigenous literature, highlights "the disjunction between non-native cultures in Canada and the indigenous landscape" and rightly observes: "Atwood emphasizes the sense of not belonging to the land; of underestimating the animistic power of the landscape" (121).

Another important aspect which brings Native issues to the forefront of Atwood's story is to be found in its allusions to the symbolic meaning of the raven. Camp Manitou adopted "a sort of totemic clan system" according to which bird names were assigned to the different age groups (Atwood 1991: 114). Lois and Lucy "graduated from Bluejays and entered Ravens" (116), and just before starting their canoe trip they were addressed as such with the salute "Greetings, my Ravens" (118). Looking back, this seemingly innocuous game can be seen as a sinister foreshadow of the fatidic day, because when Lucy disappeared at noon, "Off to the side, in the woods, a raven was croaking, a hoarse single note" (123). Taking into account the transforming attributes of the Trickster, a bearer of magic and a keeper of secrets according to Native folklore, Lucy could have gone all the way and metamorphosed herself into that raven. If "the Aztecs thought hummingbirds were the souls of dead warriors" according to one of the two protagonists of Atwood's short story "The Resplendent Quetzal" (1989: 154), there is some room, albeit small, for envisaging that Lucy's soul might have ended up inhabiting the body of a raven. However, there is no textual evidence to support that Lois imagines Lucy mutating into the raven she heard croaking. Instead, Lois explicitly contemplates the possibility that her friend might have turned into a tree, another fantastic option which would be in tune with many legends deriving from

classical mythology. She ponders that, since nobody counted "how many trees there were on the cliff just before Lucy disappeared […] Maybe there was one more, afterwards" (Atwood 1991: 129). This detail increases the Gothic undertones of the narrative.

"Death by Landscape" illustrates an important topic concerning the cultural role of the Native population in the fashioning of Canada's imaginative space and its social implications. In the second lecture collected in the volume *Strange Things*, Atwood refers to "the curious and anxiety-ridden phenomenon of whites reinventing themselves as Native people" in the wilderness, which they perceive as "the repository of salvation and new life" instead of a place to die (1995: 9, 35). This phenomenon is linked to the problematized relationship between the colonial/postcolonial space and politics, as exemplified both in literature and in the visual arts by the haunting presence of the Native peoples who were historically first displaced and then almost erased from the actual Canadian landscape. It has often been contended that the notion of an uninhabited wilderness entails an imaginary exclusion of the Native population from a mythical territory erroneously conceptualized as empty. The paintings of the Group of Seven, with their iconic representations of the void Canadian wilderness, constructed an aesthetic which reinforced and disseminated a definition of their national identity that assumed the obliteration of Natives. Hence, it seems appropriate that their emblematic art is given a prominent role in a short story which revises and intensely questions the multifaceted spatial metaphor of the Canadian wilderness and its related discourses.

5. "The North Focuses our Anxieties"

Although Tom Thomson cannot be counted as one of the Group of Seven, he exerted a strong influence on it and had been associated with it before it was officially founded and labeled in 1920. The fact that Lois has, among other paintings, "two Tom Thomsons" in her apartment leads us to connect Lucy's mysterious disappearance at noon with the death of one of the most famous painters of the Northern Ontario landscape (Atwood 1991: 110). Tom Thomson was last seen alive around mid-day on 8th July 1917, when setting out alone across Canoe Lake, in Algonquin Park, to begin a fishing trip. His overturned canoe was found empty within hours of his departure. His body, spotted floating on the lake more than a week later, was recovered, but based on the available evidence, it is still not known if he died by accident, suicide or murder. Atwood's essential remarks in her first Clarendon lecture about this real-life case —which she had already used as an example to illustrate the same point in 1987 when she published

her essay "True North" (2005: 40)— can be applied to the unsolved mystery of her fictional Lucy, except that there was no trace of the girl's body:

> There was no indication of how he had come to drown. But everyone knew, or thought they did: the Spirit of the North had claimed him as her own. […] Significant deaths, like significant lives, are those we choose to find significant. Tom Thomson's death was found significant because it fitted in with preconceived notions of what a death in the North ought to be.
> To sum up: popular lore, and popular literature, established early that the North was uncanny, awe-inspiring in an almost religious way, hostile to white men, but alluring; that it would lead you on and do you in; that it would drive you crazy, and, finally, would claim you for its own. (1995: 19)

In the same lecture, a couple of pages above, Atwood had mentioned "the uncanny lure of the North and the awful things it could do to you" (1995: 17). Fear of the North is the main reason why adult Lois would not set foot on it again: "She would never go up north, to Rob's family cottage or to any place with wild lakes and wild trees and the calls of loons" (Atwood 1991: 128). The North for Lois is obviously not the Arctic, but it is nevertheless the North from her point of view as an inhabitant of Toronto. In her first Clarendon lecture, Atwood makes us think about the various meanings of the North, depending on where we are located:

> What do we mean by 'the North'?
> Until you get to the North Pole, 'North', being a direction, is relative. 'The North' is thought of as a place, but it's a place with shifting boundaries. It's also a state of mind. It can mean 'wilderness' or 'frontier'. (1995: 8)

The perception of the North (merging with the notion of "wilderness") as "a state of mind" rather than merely a place illuminates the complex psychological process undergone by Lois, who denies that Lucy is dead because she cannot cope with her unexplained definitive disappearance. Instead of coming to accept her loss, Lois tries to keep the girl alive in her imagination, continuously struggling to believe that her summer friend may be hidden in each of the landscape paintings of her collection (1991: 129). Thus, a reading of the story in the light of Margaret Atwood's arguments enhances our awareness that, as she wrote in her essay "True North": "The north focuses our anxieties. Turning to face north, face the north, we enter our own unconscious" (2005: 33). Facing the north, however, does not assuage the crippling guilt felt by Lois, because there is no cure for her split self.

In the final scene of the narrative the place setting moves back to the apartment of the opening scene, with Lois still looking at her paintings of the Group of Seven, which are no longer called "painted landscapes" as they were denominated at the beginning of the story (Atwood 1991: 110). Her wilderness paintings are now appraised in stark contrast to those landscapes falling within the bounds of

conventional taste: "And these paintings are not landscape paintings. Because there aren't any landscapes up there, not in the old, tidy European sense, with a gentle hill, a curving river, a cottage, a mountain in the background, a golden evening sky" (128). Deliberately breaking away from colonial tradition, the members of the Group of Seven wanted to create innovative art forms so as to develop a distinctly Canadian school of painting separated from those working under the influence of European traditions. As anthropologist Eva Mackey remarks, the landscape paintings of the Group of Seven "reject the European aesthetic in favour of a construction of a 'Canadian' aesthetic based on the obliterating and overpowering sense of uncontrollable *wilderness*" (1999: 56). The samples of this new artistic production which are owned by Lois are not soothing, but disquieting, even dangerous, because "there's a tangle, a receding maze, in which you can become lost almost as soon as you step off the path" (Atwood 1991: 128). They are dynamic rather than static, since they are always mutating and have the extraordinary capacity to catch the viewer in their constant untamed movements: "There are no backgrounds in any of these paintings, no vistas; only a great deal of foreground that goes back and back, endlessly, involving you in its twists and turns of tree and branch and rock" (128-129). Instead of being stable, "the trees themselves are hardly trees; they are currents of energy, charged with violent colour" (129).

In the last paragraph of the story the paintings in the living room are metaphorically conceptualized as "the holes that open inwards on the wall, not like windows but like doors" (Atwood 1991: 129). As Simone Vauthier points out in an exemplary essay, the rejection of the windows metaphor can be explained as a dismissal of a framed static image which can only be passively observed, like the waterfront view of Lake Ontario seen by Lois through the window of her apartment (1993: 23). On the contrary, the doors metaphor conveys the idea that the paintings are "lines of flight" (in Guattari and Deleuze's terms), open passages allowing transit and escape from a constricting frame of action and experience (Vauthier 1993: 24). These doors destabilize the thresholds between life and death, between the city and the wilderness represented in the paintings which elicit the ghostly presence of Lucy's physical absence.

6. The Split Subject

In the last chapter of *Negotiating with the Dead: A Writer on Writing* (2002), a book collecting the six Empson Lectures delivered by Atwood at the University of Cambridge in 2000, the author formulates the hypothesis that "*all* writing of the narrative kind, and perhaps all writing, is motivated, deep down, by a fear of and a

fascination with mortality —by a desire to make the risky trip to the Underworld, and to bring something or someone back from the dead" (Atwood 2002: 156). This motivation certainly plays a crucial role in her writing of "Death by Landscape". Readers are likely to agree with Atwood when, a few pages below in the printed version of her last Empson lecture, she reminds them that "dead people persist in the minds of the living" (2002: 159). However, Lucy's persistence in the mind of Lois is of a different order from that of most individuals bereaved by the death of a friend. We are led to suspect that the strong bond by which Lois remains linked to Lucy is an indicator of a pathological condition. For instance, it seems strange that Lois is able to describe Lucy's physical appearance in minute detail despite having lost track of her many years ago, whereas she cannot remember what her own deceased husband looked like (Atwood 1991: 127). Likewise, she acknowledges that the most important events of her life have been effaced by her obsessive memories of Lucy. Indeed, she remains fixed on the circumstances of Lucy's disappearance while the scenes of her marriage and the birth of her children have been obliterated from her mind not by the passage of time, but because "even at the time she never felt she was paying full attention" (127-128). Leading a lonely existence, Lois is deprived of a full life while still immersed in the material world. Her predicament epitomizes the theme of death in life (or living death) which pervades the last section of this short story.

Lois believes that her tiredness is due to her living not one, but two different lives, "her own, and another, shadowy life that hovered around her and would not let itself be realized —the life of what would have happened if Lucy had not stepped sideways, and disappeared from time" (Atwood 1991: 128). This appreciation implies that Lucy has become her own dark double lingering about her, a separate self which functions outside but very close to her own self. Although Lucy is not really an example of the doppelganger, because she does not fit its definition as "a mysterious, exact double of a living person", she can be seen as a split feminine subject shadowing Lois's conscious self.

In her recollection of Lucy, Lois provides many relevant details about their relationship which may explain why her teenage friend became a fragment of her repressed inner life when she reached adulthood. The fact that both girls were only children encouraged them to pretend they were "sisters, or even twins", in spite of their striking physical differences (Atwood 1991: 115). Lucy was "blonde, with translucent skin and large blue eyes", whereas "Lois was nothing out of the ordinary —just a tallish, thinnish, brownish person with freckles" (115). This brief description of their bodily features corroborates the preceding categorization of the two girls in terms of national identity, social class, personality and behavior. Middle-class Canadian Lois defined herself in opposition to wealthy American Lucy and felt inferior to her in most respects. The United States meant for Lois the

country "where the comic books came from, and the movies" (114). Thanks to such movies she had probably learned about Hollywood, one of the only three American cities which she knew by name when she first met Lucy at the age of ten (114). The only reason why Lucy was sent to Camp Manitou on four consecutive summers was that her mother, a former Canadian, had also been a camper there. Lois resented what she perceived as small gestures of Lucy's sense of superiority, such as the way "she cast a look of minor scorn around the cabin, diminishing it and also offending Lois, while at the same time daunting her" (114).

Though friendship overcame past rivalry, the fact that Lois had seemed envious of her American friend may have been a factor taken into account by Cappie, the head of the camp, while interrogating her about Lucy's disappearance. During that interrogation, searching for a plausible explanation, Cappie openly suggested that Lois could have pushed Lucy off the cliff of Lookout Point because she got angry even though perhaps she did not realize her anger. Lois denied that veiled accusation of murder by saying that she "wasn't ever mad at Lucy", but simultaneously thought to herself: "The times when she has in fact been mad at Lucy have been erased already. Lucy was always perfect" (Atwood 1991: 126). This contradiction between what the thirteen-year-old girl said to Cappie and what she actually thought, in the immediate aftermath of the tragic event and/or in the course of further recollections, reveals an internal conflict which would last forever.

Cappie's unfair charge of murder had a pernicious effect on Lois's development into adulthood and played an important role in the psychotic splitting of her personality. Lucy's ghostly presence brings to mind that of Mary Whitney, whose ghost is supposed to haunt the possibly schizophrenic Grace Marks in *Alias Grace* (1996). Lois and Grace are split feminine subjects whose consciences are shadowed by their deceased friends, who act as their dark doubles. Both in the 1990 short story and in the 1996 novel the literary trope of spectrality serves to illuminate the shadowy or repressed aspects of their protagonists, who cast themselves as remorseful survivors and share the same malaise arising from a similar sense of guilt for having somehow failed to prevent the untimely death of their most beloved friends, or at least to have behaved differently in their regard after their disappearance.

7. Conclusion

According to Jacques Derrida, "The specter is also, among other things, what one imagines, what one thinks one sees and which one projects —on an imaginary screen where there is nothing to see" (2006: 125). Lois projects Lucy's disembodied figure not on an empty screen, but on the painted canvases and drawings of her

living room, where she does not really live, but leads a life-in-death existence. Because she is plagued by the compulsive memories of the trauma arising from Lucy's loss, which took place in the wilderness represented in these landscapes, they become a sort mirror for Lois, who inspects them in order to look for the twin she pretended to have when she was a child and desperately needs at present. Lois is certain that, if Lucy faded into landscape and did not reappear anywhere else, she must still be there.

Although the word "death" is only employed in the title of the story, its meaning suffuses the whole narrative. Obsessed with death, Lois denies that her friend is dead for the simple reason that her body was never found, but vanished without a trace. Her neurotic musings are rendered by the narrator through a series of apparently logical statements leading to a nonsensical conclusion: "But a dead person is a body; a body occupies space, it exists somewhere. You can see it; you put it in a box and bury it in the ground, and then it's in a box in the ground. But Lucy is not in a box, or in the ground. Because she is nowhere definite, she could be anywhere" (Atwood 1991: 129). These reiterative thoughts allow Lois to cling to the idea that her friend is somehow "entirely alive" in her apartment, because "everyone has to be somewhere, and this is where Lucy is" (129). Recalling how Atwood once said that she was most interested in one kind of ghost —"the ghost that one sees is in fact a fragment of one's own self which has split off" (Gibson 1973: 29)— the ghost Lucy can be interpreted as the fragment of Lois's own self which has split off. Since Lois feels that she has lost that fragment of hers while "playing Indian" in the wilderness, she is compelled to look for it in her collection of landscapes where she is sure that the ghost of Lucy is hiding.

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WAITIN' ON THE GHOST OF TOM JOAD: THE NEOLIBERAL RECONSTRUCTION OF THE DEPRESSION YEARS IN *CINDERELLA MAN*[1]

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Abstract

This paper intends to examine the political rationality of neoliberalism through the Depression Era film *Cinderella Man* (Ron Howard, 2005). While neoliberalism has been widely mapped out, critiqued, and debated in a host of academic disciplines, the myriad forms American film has articulated, represented, and integrated neoliberal narratives remains a largely understudied issue within the field of cultural studies. The present contribution addresses, through a close filmic analysis, the set of discursive strategies by which neoliberalism reenacts and renarrativizes previous ideological, political, and cultural heritages. I argue that *Cinderella Man* 'neoliberalizes' the Great Depression, highlighting individualism and resilience while totemic questions such as class identity, the legitimacy of deregulated capitalism, and the specific causes and origins of the Depression are rendered either invisible or peripheral. Taking the notion of Gramscian hegemony as the overarching theoretical principle, I draw on a variety of theorists that have inquired into the underpinnings and logics of neoliberal thinking —namely Wendy Brown (2016), Pierre Dardot and Christian Laval (2014), and David Harvey (1990). Thus, the aim of this article is to analyze *Cinderella Man* as a neoliberal filmic text which significantly departs from the normative ideological, political, and cultural imaginaries historically associated with the Great Depression.

Keywords: film studies, neoliberalism, hegemony, resilience, Great Depression.

Resumen

Este artículo pretende analizar el neoliberalismo como racionalidad política a través de la película *Cinderella Man* (Ron Howard, 2005), centrada en la Gran Depresión. A pesar de que el neoliberalismo ha sido ampliamente categorizado, evaluado y debatido en una multitud de disciplinas académicas, existe una importante carencia de estudios culturales que indaguen en las múltiples formas en que el cine estadounidense ha articulado, representado e integrado los relatos del neoliberalismo. El presente trabajo aborda, a través de un exhaustivo análisis fílmico, el conjunto de estrategias discursivas por medio de las cuales el neoliberalismo reconstruye y re-articula narrativamente legados ideológicos, políticos y culturales anteriores. Sostenemos que *Cinderella Man* 'neoliberaliza' la Gran Depresión, poniendo de relieve el individualismo y la resiliencia mientras que se opacan o minimizan cuestiones centrales como la identidad de clase, la legitimidad del capitalismo desregulado y las causas y orígenes específicos de la Gran Depresión. Tomando la noción de hegemonía Gramsciana como principio teórico sustentante, haremos uso de una serie de teóricos que han investigado las bases y lógicas del neoliberalismo —fundamentalmente Wendy Brown (2016), Pierre Dardot y Christian Laval (2014), y David Harvey (1990). Así, el objetivo de este artículo es analizar *Cinderella Man* como un texto fílmico neoliberal, significativamente escindido de los imaginarios ideológicos, políticos y culturales asociados históricamente a la Gran Depresión.

Palabras clave: estudios fílmicos, neoliberalismo, hegemonía, resiliencia, Gran Depresión.

1. Neoliberalism, Hegemony, and the New Deal

To aver that neoliberalism has mutated into a buzzword across politically-minded academic fields would be a gross understatement. What David Harvey originally termed "flexible regime of accumulation", the new paradigm that was to substitute postwar Fordist-Keynesian capitalism (1990: 124), has turned into "a global rationality that operates as a widely shared self-evident verity, pertaining not to a party logic, but to a technique, which is supposedly ideologically neutral, of governing human beings" (Dardot and Laval 2014: 190).[2] Whether understood as a type of rhetoric, a set of policies or an all-encompassing political rationality, the assumption that increasingly deregulated markets and weakened state structures correlate to enhanced personal freedoms has become, since the 1980s, the starting point for any actor to operate on politics (Brown 2016: 21-31; Harvey 2005: 5-9).

Antonio Gramsci defined hegemony as the ability of a given political force to inscribe its language and principles into political discussion so that all struggles and

beliefs are conditioned and framed in a way that certain interests and debates are upheld and legitimized while others remain occluded (Gramsci 1991: 181-182). A hegemonic complex makes citizens experience its practices and values as an indistinguishable fact of social life and not as the result of ideological struggles and historical processes which have been naturalized and normalized. Gramsci's hegemony fits the way neoliberalism has morphed into the uncontested, taken-for-granted terrain of politics: "the great ideological victory of neo-liberalism has consisted in 'de-ideologizing' the policies pursued, to the point where they are no longer subject to any debate" (Dardot and Laval 2014: 191). In the US the presidency of George W. Bush (2001-2009) exacerbated many of the most distinctive traits of neoliberalism. The Bush administration consolidated the already-hegemonic policies and vocabularies of deregulated markets, low taxation, and the notion of personal freedoms as being tantamount to a small-scale federal government unable to significantly affect the economy (Formisano 2015: 53-54; Patterson 2010: 122-130; Wilentz 2008: 436-437).

Among the string of films that may prove the hegemonic dimension of neoliberalism in American culture in the 2000s, Ron Howard's 2005 Great Depression Era film *Cinderella Man* stands as an extremely significant example. Relying on an interdisciplinary cultural studies approach, I argue that Howard's reimagining of the Depression years is articulated on the basis of two key premises. The film, on the one hand, reconstructs the Great Depression featuring a set of discursive lines largely akin to modern-day neoliberal narratives about the individual, the state, and their political independencies —or lack thereof. On the other, Howard's vision of the Great Depression resorts to filmic, cultural, and political legacies ingrained in American history that, although not neoliberal in origin, buttress neoliberal rationality. In so doing, the film fails to engage with the contents and ethos of the New Deal and the liberal progressivism of Franklin D. Roosevelt.[3]

Prior to the McCarthyist turn of the late 1940s, Hollywood produced during the 1930s and 1940s a range of socially conscious films that indicted the excesses of unregulated capitalism. "With the changes inaugurated by the New Deal […] Hollywood manifested a growing liberal sensibility. In contrast to their bosses, a host of writers, directors and stars associated themselves with its progressive reforms and campaigned for Roosevelt" (Wheeler 2016: 46). Filmmakers such as Robert Rossen, John Ford, King Vidor or Frank Capra addressed some of the very same problems tackled by the policies of the New Deal —namely abusive monopolies, class asymmetries or collusion between economic and political elites (Coma 2007: 41-42). Yet, the political messages of their films, albeit often quite critical, systematically fell within the scope of the institutions, values, and traditions of American democracy and capitalism (Junco Ezquerra 2003: 66-68). One

quintessential film within that progressive tradition is John Ford's *The Grapes of Wrath* (1940). The film encapsulates the core common-sense ideas informing the New Deal as both a programmatic policy project and an all-encompassing discourse for the nation. Those ideas could be broadly summarized as follows: that economic markets were at best imperfect, that government action ought to regulate those imperfections, the need for capitalism to be reconfigured in order to halt both extreme inequalities and rebellions, and the notion that organized labor had to play a role in the economic structure (Badger 1989: 118-119; Wells 2003: 6; Zinn 2003: 392). Although this paper is not a comparative analysis of *Cinderella Man* and *The Grapes of Wrath*, I will occasionally bring in the latter to the discussion to strengthen some of my arguments. Since *The Grapes of Wrath* is the paradigmatic New Deal-inspired film, I think it useful to incorporate it as a means to clarify how *Cinderella Man* downplays and reinterprets some crucial themes of the political culture of the Great Depression.

2. The Neoliberal Self as Great Depression Hero

Set in the hardest years of the Great Depression, *Cinderella Man* follows the comeback story of Jim Braddock (Russell Crowe). A well-established boxer in the late 1920s, Braddock and his family are driven into poverty by the meltdown of the American economy. As the plot unfolds, Braddock will make his way to the top again defeating seasoned and younger boxers —while simultaneously working as a longshoreman— and eventually becoming the heavyweight champion against all odds.

The Great Depression wrecked the legitimacy of classical laissez-faire economics across the industrialized world (Hobsbawm 1994: 94-95). American politics metabolized a number of elements that had not been particularly prominent or seen as legitimate in mainstream public discourse. The Great Depression, writes Seymour Lipset,

> undermined traditional American beliefs among large sectors of the population [and] led to the acceptance by a majority of the need for state action to reduce unemployment, to assist those adversely affected by the economic collapse, and to support trade unionism. Analyses of public opinion polls and election results noted that class factors had become highly differentiating variables. (1996: 97)

Cinderella Man transmutes that cultural and sociopolitical landscape into a Horatio Alger storyline: social distress is straightened out by one individual's relentless resolve and will. A noteworthy sequence at the beginning may be illustrative of the film's overall perspective on class, individualism, and the

historical context of the Great Depression. After introducing Braddock as a successful and well-off man living in the suburbs, there is a shot of him taking off his wristwatch in his bedroom (mins. 7-8). The camera then slowly tracks leftwards into darkness only to show Braddock again, just a few seconds later, visibly poverty-stricken in a clearly different setting in 1933. The way editing and mise-en-scène are deployed in the scene makes it seem as if the camera had literally tracked into the future switching from 1928 to 1933 without cutting. The Great Depression is thus rendered an unexplained catastrophic event, not attributable to concrete agents —and will remain so for the rest of the film. That kind of ahistoricism is, of course, not uncommon in American film.[4] However, initiating the film with such a marked narrative ellipsis foreshadows the fact that the story will largely skip wide-scope historical perspectives or inquiries into whether systemic or structural factors played a role in the Great Depression.

Still, *Cinderella Man* is no outlier in representing the Great Depression in that particular fashion. As film scholar Andrew Bergman notes, clusters of films during the Great Depression either celebrated individualism and upward mobility or deflected any questioning of them —e.g. the early 1930s gangster films (1971: 6-7), the "topical films" by director William Wellman (Bergman 1971: 96-97), or Capra's insistence on classlessness in his 1934-1941 cycle (Bergman 1971: 147). What all those films attempted to do —as does *Cinderella Man*— is to tap into cherished cultural and political values of the American self. "The emphasis in the American value system, in the American Creed" writes Lipset "has been on the individual […] America began and continues as the most anti-statist, legalistic, and rights-oriented nation" (1996: 20). In choosing that specific political and ideological background though, *Cinderella Man* mutes a significant array of other influences. In his study of the American boxing film, Leger Grindon argues that "the rise of the boxing film in the 1930s coincided with the failure of the market system during the Depression. As a result, the boxing film presented an evolving critique of the American success ethic" (2011: ch. 3). Moreover, as the boxing film came of age during 1930s and early 1940s, conventions and conflicts were introduced carrying "New Deal values that invested the genre with a fresh political attitude" (Grindon 2011: ch. 2). Those elements —potentially quite pertinent for the story of *Cinderella Man*— are all but absent in the film which, as will be later examined, pays lip service to the politics of the New Deal. The narration systematically and uncritically zeroes in on the individualist dimension of the story and its historical context, with the class struggles of the 1930s and the subsequent four decades of hegemonic Keynesian liberalism playing a rather marginal role in the political disclosure of the film. In so doing, a host of filmic-political legacies specifically linked to the film's historical context remain untapped —the cynicism, disillusionment, and

preoccupation with corruption of the early 1930s political films (Bergman 1971: 18; Christensen 1987: 31); the communal messages of *Our Daily Bread* (Vidor 1934) and *The Grapes of Wrath*; the rhetoric of the Popular Front as portrayed, for instance, in John Ford's 1939 trilogy (Morgan 2016: 260); or the overarching representation in many films from the 1930s of the federal government as a protecting and justice-delivering entity (Bergman 1971: 169).

Underpinned by a filmic and political standpoint that dispenses with class struggles and the questioning of excessive individualism, it is not surprising that *Cinderella Man* presents a silenced body of workers. At several moments in the film, Braddock goes to the docks along with many other men to be randomly picked up for shifts as longshoreman. In all of these sequences the masses of workers are depicted as an impersonal background rabble, as consequential and functional to the narration as the décor or the setting (Howard 2005: min. 13). The disgruntled and impoverished American society serves as the backdrop against which the protagonist's story is laid out, but no meaningful agency is granted to the working class. The only images portraying communal comradeship among workers appear when Braddock's fights are broadcast on the radio (min. 58). A very telling sequence before the climax shows a long shot of a church full of people praying for Braddock to win the final fight: "They all think that Jim is fighting for them" (min. 107). The masses, the film indicates, only rally once there is a sense of individual heroism that sparks and incites them to come together. However, such galvanization is not to be carried out collectively or by means of social protest, but through adherence to a heroic figure. The ideological background in these sequences is far less attuned to the political culture prevalent throughout the 1930s than to the neoliberal ontology of the individual famously summarized by Margaret Thatcher in her 1987 remark: "There is no such thing as society. There are individual men and women, and there are families. And no government can do anything except through people, and people must look to themselves first" (Thatcher 1987). The Great Depression is transformed into a heroic individual struggle in which socioeconomic difficulties are finally overcome through hard work and sacrifice —any question as to whether unadulterated and deregulated capitalism might be a system prone to inequality is entirely deflected. Political theorist Wendy Brown has seen this type of individualist atomization as being deeply imbricated into the very rationality of neoliberalism as a form of governance:

> [W]hen everything is capital, labor disappears as a category, as does its collective form, class, taking with it the analytic basis for alienation, exploitation, and association among laborers. Dismantled at the same time is the very rationale for unions, consumer groups, and other forms of economic solidarity apart from cartels among capitals. […] The transformation of labor into human capital […] obscures the visibility and iterability of class. (2016: 38, 65)

Notwithstanding, as mentioned earlier, the existence of certain Great Depression films sanctioning individualism, the film's insistent call for individual effort even disregards the ruminations typical of the boxing film on the Horatio Alger myth —the boxer being both an embodiment and a critique of it (Grindon 2011: ch. 1). Braddock undoubtedly personifies the Horatio Alger myth but at no point does the film really gauge whether that is sustainable or sensible social practice. In this sense, *Cinderella Man* is patently more ideologically conformist than its 1930s and 1940s genre counterparts, as such films incorporated elements leading to a critical approach of capitalism as part of "the New Deal ethos suspicious of capital and wary of the market opportunities" (Grindon 2011: ch. 2).

On that note, I contend that the individualism fashioned in *Cinderella Man*, much as it may arguably be linked to classical individualisms of the likes of Jefferson or Tocqueville, is ultimately neoliberal. Braddock's strictly individualistic quest is narrated while simultaneously downgrading issues of social justice and working class mobilization, thereby working against the association of the Great Depression with an indictment of financial greed, the surge of class warfare, and the figure of the state as a functional political actor. It is a form of individualism intrinsically at odds with the political hegemony incipient at that historical point. Neoliberalism certainly draws thematically and philosophically on previous forms of classical liberalism. Thus, some fundamental tenets of neoliberal thought may actually be revisions or reformulations of long-standing principles of former liberalisms, given the "malleability of liberal ideology" (Freeden 2015: 24). In other words, individualism, for instance, is part of the lexicon of neoliberalism as it is of other traditions within classical liberalism. However, from the vast repertoire of existing liberalisms, neoliberalism has retrieved forms of economic and social libertarianism and free market orthodoxy associated with figures such as Ludwig von Mises or F.A. Hayek. "In terms of liberal morphology" writes Michael Freeden, "neoliberals confine the core liberal concept of rationality to maximizing economic advantage" (2015: 109). In so doing, preoccupations informing the history of liberal thought such as the provision of minimum standards of material well-being for freedom to be actualized or the necessity of removing hindrances curtailing human growth (Freeden 2015: 43-48) are conspicuous by their absence in neoliberalism. And so are such elements missing in *Cinderella Man*. By ignoring the politically-minded aspects of the Depression Era boxing film, by eschewing a critical examination of Horatio Alger-like individualism, and by disregarding key political byproducts of the Great Depression (e.g. the role of the state, class mobilization, a critique of free market orthodoxies), the film seems solidly anchored in the present-day cultural and political hegemony of neoliberalism.

3. Good Boxer vs. Bad Activist

The neoliberal narrative by which class holds a peripheral position is most clearly articulated through the character of Mike Wilson (Paddy Considine). Portrayed as a radicalized and unbalanced man, he is the only direct reference to workers' mobilization and unionization in the film. Mike's reckless and unstable character is repeatedly contrasted with Braddock's abnegation and sense of sacrifice. The following exchange is a good example of it:

> MIKE: You know, there's people living in shacks in Central Park. Call it the Hooverville. This government's dropped us flat. We need to organize, you know? Unionize. Fight back.
> BRADDOCK: Fight? Fight what? Bad luck? Greed? Drought? No point punching things you can't see. No, we'll work a way through this. FDR, he's gonna handle it.
> MIKE: Screw FDR. FDR, Hoover, they're all the same. I stand in my living room and between the mortgage and the market and the goddamn lawyer that was supposed to be working for me it stopped being mine. It all stopped being mine. FDR ain't given me my house back yet. (Howard 2005: min 31)

Braddock seemingly "depoliticizes" the historical context, which is per se a considerably politicized take on the ongoing social conflict. On the one hand, Braddock sees labor organization as too much of an abstract and futile battle. On the other, he addresses the causes of the economic downturn as if they were inevitable or, at least, as if it were impossible to insert those in an interpretative scheme where such causes may be ascribed to specific practices and arrangements. Further into the story, Braddock will restate such a perspective through a clear-cut metaphor claiming that, as opposed to real life, in the ring at least he knows who is hitting him (Howard 2005: min. 66). The miseries of the Great Depression are thought of as an act of God whose causes remain unbeknownst to the population —in a manner reminiscent of the opening sequence jumping from pre-Depression America to 1933. The protagonist here indulges in what Gramsci called a fetishist reading of politics, a view by which society functions by itself, attached to no specific actors or material agents (Díaz Salazar 1991: 146-147).

The way Braddock reacts to Mike's class-consciousness strengthens the notion that crises are not to be thought of as windows of opportunity to intervene on structural malfunctioning, but as conjunctures demanding abnegation and sacrifice. "During the cold war […]", writes Eric Cazdyn, "to speak the language of disaster and crisis was at once to speak the language of revolution: the discourse could easily slip into revolution. Disaster and crisis were truly dangerous" (2007: 649). *Cinderella Man* articulates, however, the political conflicts of the 1930s deploying "the anti-revolutionary discourses associated with the post-cold war moment" (Cazdyn 2007: 660), with the end-of-history thesis of Francis Fukuyama (2012),

whereby crises may indeed provoke some turmoil but are not conducive to structural or significant changes. In this sense, Braddock ultimately personifies the "responsibilized individual" of neoliberalism, a political subject expected to appropriately react to any type of market disruption and "required to provide for [himself] in the context of powers and contingencies radically limiting [his] abilities to do so" (Brown 2016: 134).

The underlying premise of the conflict between Braddock and Mike, where the former is a fair-minded citizen and the latter a pessimistic agitator, is consistently legitimized throughout the film. We are shown Mike is an irresponsible drunkard, unable to provide for his family and solely focused on activism (Howard 2005: mins. 45-46). He ends up dying trying to get people organized in a Hooverville after being fired due to his constant talk about workers' rights (mins. 85-87). In the fashion of a cautionary tale, this subplot fosters the idea that it is not through political contestation and class warfare that American citizens should make sense of their society, as Mike's death warns us. Moreover, if Braddock is to be seen as the representation of the neoliberal "virtuous citizen", willing to tackle problems and thrive in society despite economic meltdown, Mike incarnates the "bad citizen" —a surrogate for "intransigent labor unions"— who remains unable to adapt to market needs (Brown 2016: 212). These ideological elements also water down the more psychologically and politically complex staples of the boxing film. "*Cinderella Man*", as Grindon bluntly puts it, "is distinctive for turning the boxer into a saint" (2011: Epilogue). He elaborates on that thesis by claiming that

> [w]hile Mike Wilson expresses criticism of the success ethic […] Jim never cries out against injustice and responds only with sensitivity to the hardships endured by his family. Braddock embodies an ideal from the film's opening moments. The hero only needs to await his justified and inevitable recognition. Such a saintly protagonist leaves aside the problems that generate and sustain film genres. (2011: Epilogue)

Grindon's contention may be explained on the grounds that the narration overemphasizes the immaculately good, all-American character of Braddock while sidestepping more critical views on the Great Depression and fashioning an ambiguous position as regards the New Deal, as will be later analyzed. I would argue that presenting such a characterization of Braddock as key components of the New Deal and the marginalization of the critical elements of the boxing film indicate the extent to which the film draws on neoliberalism and its rejection of class and the welfare state.

Even the very narrative-ideological usage of the Hooverville in the plot reinforces to a greater extent the legitimacy of neoliberal rationality. In *Cinderella Man* the Hooverville is presented through a brief and visually shadowy sequence —with

menacing point-of-view shots interspersed— which superficially shows rioting and random violence. The sequence functions to further dismantle the idea of class solidarity through Mike's demise and the representation of the Hooverville as a symbol of extreme social decay. In contrast to that depiction, the famous Hooverville sequences in *The Grapes of Wrath* (mins. 64-75) explicitly zero in on social marginalization and economic and police wrongdoing, as well as on the need for workers to organize. In a dramatic exchange, one corrupt policeman in connivance with a business contractor tries to arrest a man who, suspicious of the latter's intentions, asks him about the wages he intends to pay. When trying to intimidate and arrest the man for merely posing the question, Tom Joad (Henry Fonda) and Casy (John Carradine) hit the policeman and let the man go free. Whereas the Hooverville stands as a mere placeholder for social violence and disintegration in *Cinderella Man*, Ford uses it to represent certain forms of class empathy and solidarity as defense strategies against inequality and institutional corruption. The very visual styles used to reconstruct the Hooverville in both films are also palpably different. Ford shows it for the first time through an unvarnished point-of-view long take of the Joads in their van entering the overcrowded Hooverville as the families camped there stare at them. The scene is extremely naturalistic and matter-of-fact in visual terms. Howard speeds up editing and deploys a much darker cinematography in comparison to the rest of the film in order to intensify the chaos and violence of the Hooverville.

At this point, some additional historical references need to be included in order to clarify the extent to which Howard's film effaces key legacies of the Roosevelt tradition. Popular reluctance to the Roosevelt administration existed during the 1930s, as New Deal historian Anthony Badger has noted (1989: 34-35). However, the political climate of the time differed from that represented and normalized throughout Howard's film. Roosevelt's own rhetoric may exemplify how class played a fundamental role during the Great Depression. In the 1936 presidential campaign, Roosevelt offered a much quoted indictment of the inequalities nurtured during the 1920s and 1930s:

> We had to struggle with the old enemies of peace —business and financial monopoly, speculation, reckless banking, class antagonism, sectionalism, war profiteering. They had begun to consider the Government of the United States as a mere appendage to their own affairs. We know now that Government by organized money is just as dangerous as Government by organized mob. Never before in all our history have these forces been so united against one candidate as they stand today. They are unanimous in their hate for me —and I welcome their hatred. (Roosevelt 1936b)

In that same year, Roosevelt unequivocally likened poverty to a lack of freedom: "Necessitous men [sic] are not free men" (Roosevelt 1936a). "From 1936 to

1944", writes historian Michael Kazin "a class line stretched across presidential politics; urban wage earners of all ethnic origins overwhelmingly backed Roosevelt while their employers stuck with the GOP" (1995: 137). This historical and political background does not constitute the ideological basis of *Cinderella Man*, nor does it exert much influence in the themes of the film. Ultimately, engagement with class and political involvement appear as contextual elements that do not really drive or inform the protagonist's trajectory.

Implicit in the figure of Jim Braddock as a non-Rooseveltian hero lies the notion of the resilient subject —an element imbricated in neoliberal rationality. Resilience "connotes the capacity of a system to return to a previous state, to recover from a shock, or to bounce back after a crisis or trauma" (Neocleous 2013: 3). *Cinderella Man* is generously devoted to present Braddock undergoing a varied array of hardships —physical exhaustion, painful post-fight injuries, economic problems of all sorts, and socially embarrassing moments derived from his economic situation. Nonetheless, he eventually overcomes all those obstacles by resorting almost exclusively to his own resolve. This narrative mold is just another iteration of Puritan Manicheism —personal success and relentless effort as Americanism, personal failure as un-Americanism (Bercovitch 2011: xxxvii). Much as Jim Braddock may well be seen as yet another Horatio Alger-like character, he likewise embodies the resilient subject of neoliberalism. "Good subjects" writes Neocleous "will 'survive and thrive in any situation' […] Neoliberal citizenship is nothing if not a training in resilience as the new technology of the self: a training to withstand whatever crisis capital undergoes and whatever political measures the state carries out to save it" (2013: 5). The fact that Braddock's stoic endurance is his sole tool to overcome his precarious situation upholds, precisely, that vision whereby individuals' main resources to prosper ought to be personal autonomy, and the capacity to "operate […] in a context replete with risk, contingency, and potentially violent changes, from burst bubbles and capital or currency meltdowns to wholesale industry dissolution" (Brown 2016: 84).

The resilient subject helps transform the notion of class as obsolete insofar as human cohabitation is to be primarily understood as the interaction of autonomous citizens capable of drawing up individual plans, selecting sensible goals, and appropriately allocating resources (Dardot and Laval 2014: 107). This framework is repeatedly exercised by Braddock, who remains consistently reluctant to view class mobilization as a useful practice, and is strengthened by the very storyline of the film, which systematically renders groups of workers invisible and shows unionization as inefficient. This discourse also permeates other characters in the story such as Braddock's manager Joe Gould (Paul Giamatti). The audience is led to believe Joe is a well-off businessman; however, when Braddock's wife Mae

(Rennée Zellweger) goes to Joe's house to learn about his plans concerning Braddock's fighting career, it is disclosed that Joe is bankrupt and lives in an almost empty apartment:

> MAE: I didn't know. I mean, I thought that…
> JOE: Yeah, no. That's the idea. Always keep your hands up. Sold the last of it two days ago. So Jimmy could train. (Howard 2005: min. 68)

Not only is the narrative of resilience and extreme sacrifice articulated through the character of Braddock. Joe's actions similarly reinforce the notion of resilience as the core trait of the self and the good citizen. He goes to enormous lengths to appear as if he has remained socioeconomically stable in order to back up Braddock and get him more fights. By means of different actions, both Braddock and Joe render resilience noble, heroic, and, ultimately, efficient.

4. The Welfare State Encounters Neoliberalism

Although the film displaces central features of the Great Depression, the narration cannot circumvent the issue of the federal government —both an indispensable element during the 1930s and the main object of excoriation in the agenda of neoliberalism:

> The major theme of neo-liberalism has it that the bureaucratic state destroys the virtues of civil society —honesty, the sense of a job well done, personal effort, civility and patriotism. It is not the market that destroys society through the 'appetite for gain', for it could not function without these virtues of civil society. […] The well-intentioned fight against poverty has failed because it has deterred the poor from striving to better themselves, unlike numerous generations of immigrants. Trapping individuals in depreciated categories, a loss of dignity and self-esteem, the homogenization of the poor class —these are some of the unintended consequences of social aid. (Dardot and Laval 2014: 164)

The reduction and retooling of state structures is, indeed, a touchstone argument for neoliberalism (Harvey 2005: 76-78; Peck 2010: 9-20). However, it would be extraordinarily difficult for a cultural text to make the case against the New Deal's aggrandizement of governmental power as a safeguarding strategy in the midst of the Great Depression. "It was during the New Deal era" writes Alex Waddan "that the federal government established itself as having the ultimate responsibility for the nation's socio-economic well-being" (2002: 6). The New Deal tradition is such an important cultural and political heritage that the film cannot but participate in some of its values. For instance, in some sequences, Braddock criticizes the wealthy for being careless and removed from the daily hardships of working class people (see Howard 2005: mins. 16-17, 95).

Because of the common-sense potency of the New Deal within American culture, the film offers a middle-ground positioning regarding the federal government that fits its overall ideological disclosure and does not get to attack Roosevelt's sacrosanct legacy. In a moment of extreme need, Braddock obtains some financial aid from the Emergency Relief Administration —an agency reinvigorated by New Deal investments. The highly expressive score and mise-en-scène —a high-angle framing followed by a tracking shot featuring a crowded government office— emphasize how dramatic and humiliating the moment is for Braddock, who is even recognized by the clerk handing him the money (Howard 2005: min. 39). While it would be farfetched to pin down this sequence per se as an indictment of the welfare system, it is later on that the film discloses a clearer neoliberal subtext. When he has recovered financially, Braddock returns the money to the treasury. In a public interview, when questioned about this issue, he answers as follows:

> REPORTER: Two days ago, we ran a story about you giving your relief money back. Can you tell our readers why?
> BRADDOCK: I believe we live in a great country. A country that's great enough to help a man financially when he's in trouble. But lately I have had some good fortune and I'm back in the black. And I just thought I should return it. (min. 89)

The ideological ambiguity of this narrative strand reveals a discourse that merges two different standpoints. There is the acknowledgement that some form of welfare coverage is necessary in certain moments of extreme social and economic peril. However, the protagonist's returning of the money indicates that accepting such aid as a legitimate right would be somewhat detrimental. The sequence simultaneously recognizes the legitimacy of the New Deal and casts doubt as to the whether its policies are fully moral and valid in the long run. Grindon sees an unresolved ambivalence in that regard since the film "shows compassion for the poor in representing the hardship of the Braddock family" but, at the same time, Braddock repaying his welfare money implies that "decent citizens should not look to the state for assistance in time of need. Having it both ways" continues Grindon "undermines the film, as its conflicts dissolve in Ron Howard's feel-good sensibility" (2011: Epilogue). Thus, the film incorporates the assumption that government assistance, albeit imperative at very specific times, ought not to be a normative model of action. Much as the policies of the New Deal are not explicitly questioned in the sequence, its ideological subtext is linked to political narratives that have equated Rooseveltian liberalism with well-intended yet ultimately dangerous un-American tendencies towards "intrusive big government" and debilitated "individual initiative and risk" (Wilentz 2008: 136). As opposed to that view on the federal government, in the last act of *The Grapes of Wrath,* the

Joad family arrives at a well-equipped camp efficiently and humanely run by the Department of Agriculture, where corrupt policemen and businessmen are denied access. Ford's film is not nearly as middle-of-the-road in their support of government intervention as Howard's. While *Cinderella Man* sees the role of government as somewhat necessary yet not fully legitimate, *The Grapes of Wrath* is considerably less ambiguous in its Keynesian message: in moments of great need the federal government must act upon the economy, highlighting the main political prescription of the New Deal: "What the New Deal did […] was create an expectation that government *could* and therefore would act to sweeten the economy" (Waddan 2002: 32).

5. *Cinderella Man* as a 'New Democrats' Cultural Text

There is yet another reading concerning domestic American politics and one of its most recent realignments. As examined in previous sections, *Cinderella Man* does not explicitly indict the New Deal but neither do Roosevelt's policies inform the film as a political and cultural text. At best, FDR and the old-style Democratic Party are nominally accepted. There are, however, instances where the film seemingly embraces the language of class. Before the final fight for the heavyweight championship, Braddock is warned that his final opponent and current heavyweight champion Max Baer (Craig Bierko) has killed some boxers in the ring. Braddock answers as follows:

> You think you're telling me something? What, like, boxing's dangerous, something like that? You don't think triple shifts or working nights on the scaffolds is just as likely to get a guy killed? How many guys died the other night living in cardboard shacks trying to save on rent money? Guys who were trying to feed their family. 'Cause men like you have not yet quite figured out a way to make money out of watching that guy die. In my profession, and it's my profession I'm a little more fortunate. (Howard 2005: min. 95)

However, the analysis offered in previous sections, as well as the occasional comparisons with *The Grapes of Wrath*, have made it clear that the ideological narratives underpinning Howard's film do not originate in the Rooseveltian tradition.

It is my argument that *Cinderella Man* draws on the political culture of the New Democrats —a faction within the Democratic Party revolving around the presidency of Bill Clinton (1993-2001). Clintonism sought to develop more centrist political positions while appropriating certain elements from the conservative hegemony of the 1980s.[5] During the 1970s and 1980s, a significant number of Democrats became increasingly reluctant to acknowledge New Deal

liberalism as their political tradition. In public discourse the notion of an active federal government —the very foundation of New Deal liberalism— became tantamount to onerous taxation, bureaucracy, and wasteful and inefficient welfare programs (Aronowitz 1992: 422; Berman 1998: 57; Troy 2004: 68), as then-candidate Ronald Reagan so famously encapsulated in the 1980 presidential debate: "Government is not the solution to our problems, government is the problem" (Reagan 1980), initiating a twelve-year period of Republican presidencies. This was the context for well-known moments in recent political history for the Democratic Party such as 1988 Democratic presidential candidate Michael Dukakis strenuously and repeatedly claiming he was not a liberal (Depoe 1997: 100-104) or Bill Clinton announcing in the 1996 State of the Union Address "the end of big government" (Clinton 1996) —using the very same vocabulary Reaganism had deployed throughout the 1980s to indict the politics of postwar liberalism.

Faced with the fact that conservatism had become hegemonic, a group of politicians and intellectuals within the Democratic Party —most of them associated with the Democratic Leadership Council— assumed that some form of political readjustment was needed in order to counteract the anti-government, anti-liberal narratives legitimized during the Reagan years. The DLC's thesis was that "the Democratic Party could only win if it moved 'to the center', severing ties with its constituent groups and embracing certain free-market policies of the right" (Frank 2016: 57). Given that Reaganism had transformed conservatism into the hegemonic language and practice of American politics, Democrats were to accommodate into that landscape:

> [Clinton's] claim was that he was a Democrat who recognized that there was no going back to the old days, good or bad depending on perspective, of the New Deal and Great Society. […] So just as Eisenhower had not tried to repeal the New Deal and as Nixon had accepted the continued expansion of the American welfare state so too Clinton was bound to find an accommodation with elements of the Reagan legacy. (Waddan 2002: 10)

This gave way to the famous politics of triangulation during the 1990s whereby Democrats were to combine class-inspired rhetoric to retain some of their historical constituents while enacting policies favorable to corporate interests (Nichols and McChesney 2013: 32). The principal implication of the New Democrats' approach was that the New Deal had become an obsolete political guideline: "Democrats could no longer be the party of Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal coalition, with its heavy reliance upon labor and its tendency to see issues through the lens of social class. […] [T]he Great Depression —the period that formed the identity of the Democratic Party— was a far-off country suffering

from incomprehensible troubles. The New Deal was quickly becoming irrelevant" (Frank 2016: 44-49).

Cinderella Man is nothing if not a reinforcement of the assumptions underpinning the politics of the New Democrats. The Rooseveltian tradition is obviously present and plays a role in the story but its political prescriptions and languages do not inform the protagonist's quest. Although there might be occasional praise for FDR and the welfare state is not flatly condemned, the core contents of the New Deal are not upheld or legitimized, let alone celebrated. In light of the analysis performed, and the themes and discourses pointed out, Jim Braddock stands for individualism, resilience, and reluctance to view class as an identity vector. Class consciousness, government interventionism, a critical stance towards big business and exploitation, and grassroots mobilization —the basic constituents of the New Deal and the FRD tradition— may well be acknowledged along the story but these do not constitute the discourse of the film.

Howard's film ends with Braddock winning the heavyweight championship in a historic upset, culminating the narrative of the resilient underdog. It seems worth referencing for the last time *The Grapes of Wrath*, in this case, some extracts from the famous last speech by Tom Joad:

> I've been thinking about us too. About our people living like pigs and good, rich land laying fallow. Or maybe one guy with a million acres and 100,000 farmers starving. And I've been wondering if all our folks got together and yelled […] Well, maybe it's like Casy says. Fella ain't got a soul of his own, just… a little piece of a big soul. The one big soul that belongs to everybody. […] I'll be all around in the dark. I'll be everywhere wherever you can look. Wherever there's a fight so hungry people can eat, I'll be there. Wherever there's a cop beating up a guy, I'll be there. I'll be in the way guys yell when they're mad. I'll be in the way kids laugh when they're hungry and they know supper's ready. And when the people are eating the stuff they raise and living in the houses they build I'll be there too. (Ford 1940: mins. 120-122)

It is unthinkable that Jim Braddock should utter such a communalist and class-infused speech at the end of *Cinderella Man* because the Rooseveltian language is not his political background. His is shaped by a different set of values and by a different Democratic Party —one premised upon a central narrative Thomas Frank has summed up as follows:

> What workers need […] is to be informed that […] there's nothing anyone can do to protect them. That resistance is futile. That only individual self-improvement is capable of lifting you up —not collective action, not politics, not changing how the economy is structured. (2016: 68)

6. Conclusion

Cinderella Man is not a Rooseveltian film. The New Deal and its political culture are not really celebrated in the film, nor do they seem to be shown as completely legitimate. However, Howard's film is not Manichean or extremely partisan in articulating its discourse. This is so because, despite the hegemonic status of neoliberalism, hegemony does not function along starkly and one-dimensionally ideological lines. As Stuart Hall had it, "[c]ultural hegemony is never about pure victory or pure domination […] [I]t is never a zero-sum cultural game; it is always about shifting the balance of power in the relations of culture; it is always about changing the dispositions and the configurations of cultural power not getting out of it" (1996: 471). Thus, a neoliberal film such as *Cinderella Man* does not flatly neglect or demonize the political and cultural legacy of the New Deal. Instead, the film inscribes the narratives of neoliberalism in fundamental aspects of the storyline —framing critical issues such as class, the individual, and the state so that these cohere with neoliberal values— while retaining a series of iconographies related to Rooseveltian liberalism and mainstream conceptions of Americanism. Images of the working class, poverty, state-run agencies, and comments against the well-off do appear but these do not sustain and articulate the discourse of the film.

What this paper has ultimately sought to understand is how political and cultural meanings can be renegotiated and rearticulated in film, in this case, how neoliberalism may tap into imaginaries historically and culturally bound up with Rooseveltian liberalism. Any period from history may be narratively and ideologically patterned so that specific sets of symbols and rationales are enshrined while others are rendered secondary. In this sense, I have argued that *Cinderella Man* integrates the narratives of neoliberalism into a period of central significance for American progressivism and working class mobilization. The Great Depression is hegemonized in this film by neoliberalism. Thus, the ideological readability (Žižek 2008: 15) of *Cinderella Man* impels the audience to make sense of the Great Depression through the neoliberal subject. In so doing, the film constructs an ideological framework that diminishes the role of the systemic elements in economic crises and promotes individuals' responsibility as the main driving force that may bring about solutions. In George Orwell's *1984* one of the slogans of The Party reads as follows: "who controls the past controls the future" (1990: 37). The hegemonic rewriting of history through cultural texts may well prove Orwell' point since, as *Cinderella Man* exemplifies, present-day hegemonies and legitimacies can be further reasserted and reinforced on the basis of re-narrating the past.

Notes

[1]. This paper is part of the Research Project "Justice, Citizenship and Vulnerability: Precarious Narratives and Intersectional Approaches" (FFI2015-63895-C2-1-R), funded by the Spanish Ministry of Economy and Competitiveness.

[2]. For a periodization of the stages of neoliberalism see Harvey (2005: 5-38) and Peck (2010: 1-38).

[3]. A clarifying note needs to be included so that the theses defended in the article can be intelligible. In American English the word "liberalism" alludes to the political left or center left —the usage I will stick to when referring to Roosevelt's legacy. "It was the Keynesian advocacy of an interventionist state and regulated markets", explain Steger and Roy, "that gave 'liberalism' its modern economic meaning: a doctrine favouring a large, active government, regulation of industry, high taxes for the rich, and extensive social welfare programmes for all" (2010: 8-9). For Europeans, on the other hand, "liberals" are usually thought to be advocates of anti-statist laissez faire (Lipset 1996: 36). The term neoliberalism encapsulates this latter meaning, that is, a market-oriented reaction against social democracy and its American equivalent (i.e. liberal New Deal-inspired policies). In the United States neoliberal policies have been referred to as deregulation.

[4]. David Bordwell has established that classical Hollywood films tended to make "history unknowable apart from its effects upon individual characters" (1985: 13). In turn, modern Hollywood filmmaking largely applies the same core narrative techniques and plot patterns classical films did (Bordwell 2006: 50).

[5]. The realignments within the Democratic Party from the Carter Administration until the Clinton years can be revised in Berman (1998: 164-187), Frank (2016: 62-105), Waddan (2002: 1-43), and Wilentz (2008: 323-381).

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Reviews

THE INTROSPECTIVE REALIST CRIME FILM

Luis M. García-Mainar
London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016.
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Even though crime fiction, both in its literary and cinematic forms, has been the most popular genre for a long time now in Western societies (Cavender and Jurik 2016: 323), there is no absolute agreement as to its generic definition and boundaries. Detective novel, thriller, hard-boiled detective film, film noir, shocker, suspense thriller or mystery novel are all terms that have been used to define novels or films that deal in different ways with crimes and their investigations. Even one of its most important practitioners (Raymond Chandler) had trouble defining and classifying it when writing about the other big name in the hard-boiled detective school (Dashiell Hammett) in *The Simple Art of Murder*; he described him as an author of "realistic mystery fiction" as opposed to "the traditional or classic or straight deductive or logic and deduction novel of detection" ([1950] 1988: 4), in a clumsy attempt at definition that underlines the extreme difficulty of the task at hand. Luis M. García-Mainar's choices in *The Introspective Realist Crime Film* ('crime fiction' and 'crime film') seem to have caught on in the last few years as umbrella terms for works where the primacy of crime structures the text and imposes a certain hierarchy that leaves out of the canon works like *Little Red Riding Hood* or *Crime and Punishment*, as Jerry Palmer pointed out: "What constitutes crime fiction as such is that the presentation of crime comes to dominate the fictional structure by taking a particular place in the hierarchy of discourses that constitute the text" (1991: 142). As French critics Borde and Chaumeton

indicated already in 1955 about film noir, the presence of crime is the defining feature of these films —"c'est la presence du crime qui donne au film noir sa marque la plus constante. […] le film noir est un film de mort" (5-6)— and imposes a general feeling of unease that characterizes not only film noir but crime fiction and crime films in general: "La vocation du film noir était de créer un malaise spécifique" (1955: 15). The feeling of unease is also related to the social commentary developed by crime films when they delineate and manipulate the boundaries of the 'criminal triangle' created around crime —the victim, the criminal and the investigator. As Thomas Leitch has pointed out, the central problem that defines the crime film is its attempt to challenge the status of the law by setting clear-cut positions regarding it and then showing their fluid nature, since, for example, the investigator may become a criminal and the criminal may be shown as a victim (2002: 1-17).

Luis M. García-Mainar has identified a group of Hollywood and international crime films that since the early 2000s have shifted their focus from action or suspense onto the characters' personal experience of crime and onto the social contexts of crime. He has coined the descriptive, albeit none-too-catchy term "introspective realist crime films" and has published a monograph with Palgrave Macmillan devoted to this new subgenre, exemplified by films such as *Mystic River* (2003), *Michel Clayton* (2007), *A Mighty Heart* (2007), *Zodiac* (2007), *Tropa de élite* (2007), *El secreto de sus ojos* (2009), *Un prophète* (2009), or *Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy* (2011). In contrast with the crime films of the 1980s and 1990s, characterized by action, spectacle and the aesthetics of postmodernism, "introspective realist crime films" look back to the visual and narrative features of crime films from the 1970s like *Klute* (1971), *The Conversation* (1974), *Three Days of the Condor* (1975) or *All the President's Men* (1976), and show an interest in the social dimension of their stories, expressed "through the characters' complex subjectivity, heightened by means of an aesthetic of pathos and realism" (2). In order to define these films, García-Mainar uses an open concept of genre that, drawing from Altman —the idea of genre as process—, Derrida —the idea of participation in a genre without actually belonging to it— and Wittgenstein —the idea of family resemblances inside categories—, relies on a flexible perspective of conventions, groups and categories. García-Mainar relates the realism of these films to their use of conventions typical of melodrama, but prefers to use the term 'drama' for these films since it "provides the connections with everyday life central to the crime film subgenres" (19), helping to emphasize pathos, sympathy with the victims' suffering, as an element essential to creating the illusion of realism.

García-Mainar uses an interdisciplinary approach to relate these films to Scandinavian crime fiction, such as Henning Mankell's Wallander novels or the

Millenium trilogy, since they all share an introspective outlook, a sense of pathos and a social mind. Similarly, he establishes the connections between the introspective realist crime films that appeared in the 2000s and the television programmes from the 1990s —police procedurals like *Homicide: Life on the Streets* (NBC, 1993-1999) and *NYPD Blue* (ABC, 1993-2006)— and, more pertinently, 'quality' television series of the 2000s like *The Wire* (HBO, 2002-2008), *Breaking Bad* (AMC, 2008-2013), or *The Americans* (FX, 2013-). These television series have influenced Hollywood and international films —in a process that R. Colin Tait has called the "HBO-ification of genre"— in features like realism —related to the lack of closure shared by the serial format and everyday life—, narrative complexity, a slow narrative rhythm, careful exploration of character psychology, ethical dilemmas and a certain pessimism about social matters. *The Wire*, in this sense, seems to be a paradigmatic case, not only in terms of direct influence, but also by the presence of scriptwriters who are also crime writers in their own right, like George Pelecanos, Dennis Lehane or Richard Price, who have created urban crime fiction with a realist aesthetic and strong social commitment. To this interdisciplinary approach, García-Mainar adds a transnational perspective that allows him to discuss influences like European art cinema, Italian neorealism, the Nouvelle Vague, the Dogme School or the films of the Dardenne brothers, and include in his analysis films from Argentina —*El secreto de tus ojos* (2009) or *El aura* (2005)—, Chile —*Tony Manero* (2008)—, France —*Un prophète* (2009)—, Brazil —*Tropa de élite* (2007)—, Germany —*Das Leben der Anderen* (2006)—, Italy —*Gomorra* (2008)—, or Spain —*Celda 211* (2009), *La isla mínima* (2013).

Having identified and defined the corpus of this analysis, García-Mainar undertakes the task of organizing this group of films into something more than a list and he does so by organizing them into four chapters: two of these (chapters 4 and 5) are structured around aesthetic issues —pictorial realism and the documentary look—, and the other two (chapters 6 and 7) around narrative ones —the peripheral point of view and the complex narrative. He then combines these issues with other features —like introspection and helplessness—, chooses two films that he discusses in depth as representative of each subgroup, and mentions other films that share "family resemblances" with the leading film of the group. For example, he chooses *Mystic River* and *Tropa de élite* as representative of the complex narrative and its use to dissect social issues, institutions and solutions, in order to expose the complicity of the forces that shape the characters' worlds. He studies these two films in detail and reviews other films that constitute their 'family': *Silver City, Traffic*, and *Syriana* (*Mystic River*'s 'family'), and *Tropa de élite 2, Gomorra,* and *Ajami* (*Tropa de élite*'s 'family'). While this organizational strategy seems a bit forced at times, since some films could —and probably should— be included in several chapters, it allows García-Mainar to describe his corpus of films with varying

detail and simultaneously identify their main narrative and aesthetic features clearly. All the 'primary' films within each chapter are analyzed both from a thematic and formal point of view, paying special attention to the visual aspect and cinematography. The shots from these films that accompany the text are well chosen but have unfortunately been reproduced with a quality that does little justice to the films they come from or to the text that describes them.

The Introspective Realist Crime Film is a very valuable addition to the field of genre film studies; it develops a compelling argument about the contemporary evolution of crime film as well as very incisive readings of the group of films under consideration; it helps to understand in depth not only these films, but also the society and culture that has produced them as well as the general features of crime fiction in general. It will be of interest not only to the scholar but also to the general public keen on contemporary film and culture.

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WHEN HIGHBROW MEETS LOWBROW: POPULAR CULTURE AND THE RISE OF NOBROW

Peter Swirski and Tero Eljas Vanhanen, eds.
New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017.
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When Highbrow Meets Lowbrow: Popular Culture and the Rise of Nobrow is a collection of nine articles on popular culture by nine professors or cultural scholars from around the world: Europe, Canada, Australia, America and Hong Kong. More specifically, as the subtitle shows, the book is about 'nobrow', a term that one of the editors (Peter Swirski) has previously studied at length in his monographs *From Lowbrow to Nobrow* (2005) and *American Crime Fiction: A Cultural History of Nobrow Literature as Art* (2016).

Peter Swirski and Tero Eljas Vanhanen, editors of this collection, are indeed not the first to have used the term. In 2000, following the examples of 'highbrow' and 'lowbrow', John Seabrook, an American scholar, coined 'nobrow' to signify certain contemporary cultural qualities that are neither highbrow nor lowbrow. But Swirski, when he begins to use it in *From Lowbrow to Nobrow*, turns the tables by allowing nobrow to embrace both of the extremes, so that it embodies an eclectic mix of high- and lowbrow. This is the way nobrow is understood in this collection.

Since, as Swirski recites on various occasions, highbrow stands for everything elite or classic, experimental, inventive, individual, variable, artistic, intellectual, complex, rewarding, social, critical etc. while lowbrow, being low, stands for the very opposite —popular, conventional, generic, conforming, simple, entertaining, emotional, personal and unhealthy, etc.— so the eclectic mix of high- and lowbrow may happen in a literary work by juxtaposing any feature with that in the opposite

camp, for instance, conventional with inventive, conformity with individuality, art with entertainment, complexity with simplicity, social with personal, etc.

Swirski has used other names or expressions for specific examples of nobrow, like "artertainment" (2005: 93), "pulps with gravitas" (2016: 22), "beachbook for intellectuals" (2005: 170), or the more general term "nobrow art" (2005: 6). In *From Lowbrow to Nobrow* Swirski already gives essential shape to the nobrow thought as adumbrated above, which he continues to elaborate in *American Crime Fiction* and again in the present book edited with Tero Eljas Vanhanen. Swirski has systematically studied a series of literary genres, such as American crime fiction, American political fiction, and other fictions through the concept of nobrow. Bearing this in mind, we come back to *When Highbrow Meets Lowbrow*, Swirski's and Vanhanen's new approach to the term. As an edited collection the book achieves several things that are worth noting: one, it deepens the nobrow theory and our understanding of it; two, it testifies to the nobrow theory in an all-round way; three, it extends the application of the nobrow theory.

First, *When Highbrow Meets Lowbrow* further deepens the nobrow theory so far developed by Swirski. In "Introduction—Browbeaten into Pulp" (Chapter 1), written by both editors, and "Nobrow, American Style" (Chapter 3), written by Swirski himself, the concept of nobrow is defined and further developed. For instance, "three distinct, if closely related" domains of nobrow are identified, namely, nobrow as a cultural formation, nobrow as a creative strategy, and nobrow as identified within massively crowd-sourced audiences. Nobrow is not just a creative or literary strategy reduced to written fiction. It exists in social and cultural contexts and is received in specific ways by readers or audiences. No longer is nobrow restricted to literature or any text but free to travel the overall cultural domain.

Swirski, in his chapter, also compares nobrow with the well-known term "middlebrow": "Where middlebrow culture runs alongside the middle of the road like a monorail does, nobrow is a cultural engine that runs on two rails" (36-37). In short, he renders them decidedly different. Similar comparison is made by Beth Driscoll in her "Middlebrow and Nobrow" (Chapter 4), in which Driscoll scrutinizes the limit of middlebrow where it fades out and nobrow begins in fictions commonly known as middlebrow. In this way the nobrow theory, as well as our understanding of it, is deepened and not least through the book's further testification and application of it as we will see next.

Second, *When Highbrow Meets Lowbrow* testifies to the nobrow theory. In fact, each of the articles of the book quotes Swirski or cites his nobrow concept many times throughout, which is already an act of recognizing nobrow as something theoretically tenable. Moreover, articles like "Pop Culture and Nobrow Culture",

"Middlebrow and Nobrow", and "Prequels to Nobrow" even employ the term for their titles; by so doing they presuppose nobrow in the first place, whether or not they will go any further to prove nobrow to be theoretically or practically true. Anyhow, most of the articles end up defending the nobrow theory by Swirski in one way or another.

In discussing the nobrow aesthetics in American Gothic fiction, "Gothic Literature in America" (chapter 6) by Agnieszka Soltysik Monnet goes so far as to affirm that even Gothic fictions boast of the nobrow nature, so much stressed by Swirski, of combining the features of both high- and lowbrow literature and "literary ambition with popular forms and audiences" (111). By the same token, Tero Eljas Vanhanen's "The Good, the Bad, and the Nobrow" (Chapter 10) witnesses the nobrow nature, which is so much overlooked by scholars of violence fictions, of blending high art (highbrow) with gory violence (lowbrow), again in the manner Swirski suggests.

Other articles turn to testify to nobrow more generally. "Pop Culture and Nobrow Culture" (Chapter 2) is by Arthur Asa Berger, one of the precursors of cultural studies, who once taught at San Francisco State University. He first traces the history of cultural studies and his own half-century-long career in it. Then, he illustrates the close relationship between cultural studies, postmodernism and discourse analysis. Finally he dwells on popular culture and nobrow culture with reference to Swirski. As he describes it, we are assured that nobrow is the natural outcome of both popular culture and cultural studies. In "Prequels to Nobrow" (Chapter 5), Kenneth Krabbenhoft tries to evidence nobrow from history. Here under observation is the 2,000-year history of Western verbal correctness whose principles had kept on changing, from the ancient unibrow theory through the Christian unbrow theory, until the modern nobrow theory which inevitably absorbed the former two. Suffice it to say that Krabbenhoft grounds nobrow solidly in history.

Again mention should be made of Swirski's own corroboration. This time, he is able to establish his nobrow on newly found evidence. One such piece is from interactive fiction, crowd-sourced fiction and use-generated film, which embody the crossover, eclectic, and participatory nature (nobrow) of contemporary culture to the full (46-50). He even calls our attention to a test conducted recently on the groove, a popular form of music, a test which, as he points out, reveals the music's traits of incorporating variability into regularity or complexity into simplicity (39-42) —that is, in other words, nobrow. These cases exemplify his theory of nobrow very well.

And third, *When Highbrow Meets Lowbrow* extends the application of nobrow theory. As mentioned above, ever since his proposal of nobrow in 2005, Swirski

has applied it consecutively as a new approach to fictions, e.g. political fiction, crime fiction, science fiction, and so forth. *When Highbrow Meets Lowbrow* extends the scope in which Swirski's nobrow theory can be applied, in literature and beyond.

In literature, its application is extended to more genres, for example, Gothic fiction and violence fiction as we see respectively in "Gothic Literature in America" (Chapter 6) and "The Good, the Bad, and the Nobrow" (Chapter 10), and also to science fiction at large as seen in "Neither Indian Reservation Nor Baboon Patriarchy" (Chapter 7). These cases of application, in addition to those by Swirski himself elsewhere, cannot but anticipate even further application of the nobrow theory to fictions of any genre —or, for that matter, to all literature, generic and classic, since nobrow does not distinguish between generic and literary. Nobrow theory is further applied to address cultural issues, such as fashion art and popular culture as we respectively see in "Mambo Clothing and Australian Nobrow" (Chapter 8) by Chris McAuliffe and in "Pop Culture and Nobrow Culture" (Chapter 2) by Arthur Asa Berger. All these examples denote the wide applicability of the nobrow theory in the area of literature or culture.

"Cultural studies", the general term for the multiple methods of criticism of today, is not a theory itself. Indeed, it needs a theory of its own. Thus, Swirski offers his theory of nobrow. For twelve years —a full Chinese decade— starting from 2005 when he first used the term, Swirski had been constantly cultivating his nobrow theory. In *When Highbrow Meets Lowbrow*, Swirski and Vanhanen, with the aid of the contributors to the collection, strengthen nobrow theory by further deepening it, roundly singing its praises and significantly extending its use. Following this campaign, many more people will surely become nobrow oriented —we live in a world of increasing nobrow after all— and find nobrow useful as a new approach to our culture.

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POETRY AND POETICS AFTER WALLACE STEVENS

Bart Eeckhout and Lisa Goldfarb, eds.
New York: Bloomsbury, 2017.

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Neither Bart Eeckhout nor Lisa Goldfarb, the editors of *Poetry and Poetics after Wallace Stevens,* is new to Stevensian studies. Together with Glen MacLeod, Goldfarb was also in charge of the special issue of *The Wallace Stevens Journal* (2017) dedicated to teaching Stevens, while Eeckhout worked on such seminal texts as *Wallace Stevens across the Atlantic* (Eeckhout and Ragg 2008) and *Wallace Stevens and the Limits of Reading and Writing* (Eeckhout 2002). Despite numerous contributions of the editors to the field, it seems that *Poetry and Poetics after Wallace Stevens* is their finest achievement so far.

In the introduction, Eeckhout points out the general idea behind the present assemblage of texts, which is "to take a concerted look at the larger landscape of poetry and poetics after Stevens" (5). Indeed, the same is evident from the table of contents, in which texts vary from academically established discussions within American Modernism (e.g. Bonnie Costello's "Frost or Stevens? Servants of Two Masters") to the more rarely mentioned phenomenon of Modernism in communist realities (Justin Quinn's "Stevens across the Iron Curtain"). By presenting such a variety of views as well as repeatedly arguing against the dualism between Pound and Stevens, which was brought about by Marjorie Perloff's well-known article (Perloff 1982), the book attempts to break as many borders as possible so as to start a new, truly open discussion free from dualistic approaches and simplistic solutions.

Ironically, our journey in this brave new discussion starts with the aforementioned article titled "Frost or Stevens? Servants of Two Masters", which naturally evokes the memory of Perloff's piece. Yet, Costello only plays with the idea of a two-folded division of a poetical world. What she explores is the influence of Frost and Stevens on a new generation of poets because, as dissimilar as the two poets' heritage is, their influence sometimes proves to be tied together, not divided, which is shown through the work of two American formalists, Richard Wilbur and Howard Nemerov. The same line of argument is taken by Lee M. Jenkins in her "The Strands of Modernism: Stevens beside the Seaside". Jenkins offers to leave the USA and follow Stevens' connection with Europe, more precisely, the UK and the poems of Nicholas Moore, David Gascoyne, and Peter Redgrove, which demonstrate how significant Stevens and particularly his "The Idea of Order at Key West" were for English war and post-war poetry. The very accurately put conclusion is that the contrast of Pound and Stevens is needless, for the latter's work is a paradox of itself which brings together those opposites that we tend to apply to all poetry of the twentieth century, e.g. 'lyric' vs. 'collage', 'Expressionism' vs. 'Constructivism', 'Symbolism' and its alternatives (38).

Eeckhout's article links Stevens with another distinguished poet, Silvia Plath. "Hearing Stevens in Silvia Plath" attempts to see the relation between the two beyond a rather superficial influencer-influencee perspective so as to view Stevens and Plath as equals. Through the analysis of Plath's "Night Shift", Eeckhout proves that the term 'aesthetic sharing' should be preferred to 'allusion' or 'echo' when discussing Stevens' link to Plath's work. Thus, the article does not confine itself to a close reading of a poem; it also seeks to establish a perspective that will benefit future researchers of poetry and its interconnectedness. For this reason, "Hearing Stevens in Silvia Path" is one of the most compelling articles presented in the book. Another esteemed poet is related to Stevens in the course of the book as Angus Cleghorn suggests a view on Elizabeth Bishop's engagement with Stevens' blank verse. "Moving the 'Moo' from Stevensian Blank Verse" demonstrates Bishop's progressive inclusion of the rhythms we hear in Stevens' poetry into her work.

Next, we come back to Europe with Axel Nesme's "Henri Michaux's *Elsewhere* through the Lens of Stevens' Poetic Theory". Nesme also makes a connection of Michaux with Freud's *The Interpretation of Dreams*, thus going beyond a purely literary approach in order to embark on one of the most influential thinkers of the past century. As is evident from Nesme's chapter, Michaux was marked by Stevensian views on art and followed his double imperative of "It Must Be Abstract" and "It Must Change". Both form a fundamental part of Michaux's own aesthetics, which Nesme wittily characterises as "dystopian evocations" combined with "macabre humor" (76).

Justin Quinn's "Stevens across the Iron Curtain" is one of the most emblematic pieces of the present collection, for it considers Eastern-European literature, which is often left out of the discussion of Western Modernism. Besides, the article focuses on the almost non-existing influence of Stevens on Czech poets, which is an original angle as well. The study suggests that there are several reasons for Stevens' poetry failing to reach Czech audiences, the most important of them being the literary and political contexts of the 1970s. George S. Lensing starts his "Stevens and Seamus Heaney" with a similar concept of Stevens' (only temporary) non-presence in the UK and Northern Irish literary arena until Heaney and Seamus Deane 'discovered' the American poet. Even more names are brought into the discussion by Edward Ragg, who explores how Stevens' poetics relates to George Oppen and Louise Glück. A possible closure to such a varied discussion of Stevens' relation to other authors is to be found in Al Filreis' "The Stevens Wars", which holds that the Modernist's "effect on poetics has been diffuse and nearly unidentifiable on the whole" (138). As enlightening as Al Filreis' contribution to the book is, the style chosen for it seems too personal for such an academic selection of texts. Similarly to Al Filreis, Lisa Goldfarb in her "Stevens' Musical Legacy: 'The Huge, High Harmony'" concludes that the echoes of Stevensian musicality are countless, as "there may be as many 'Stevenses' as there are poets touched by him" (169). This is also maintained by Joan Richardson's "'Ghostlier Demarcations, Keener Sounds': Stevens, Susan Howe, and the Souls of the Labadie Tract", in which the researcher explores how the sounds of Stevens' poetry became inseparable from Howe's book.

Charles Altieri's "How John Ashbery Modified Stevens' Uses of 'As'" focuses on a concrete trope, which was also employed by Ashbery, although for a different purpose; for him, 'as' is both a complex temporal space and an "opportunity to develop participatory equivalence" (191). Another poet doubtlessly influenced by Stevens is discussed by Juliette Utard, who presents an original commentary on the late poetry of A.R. Ammons in addition to the concept of 'late style' itself. By comparing Stevens' *The Rock* and Ammons' *Glare*, Utard indicates that the term 'late style' is a mere construct, not an established fact of a writer's development.

Lisa M. Steinman and Rachel Galvin deal with questions of race in light of Stevensian poetics. The former's "Unanticipated Readers" offers a more general overview of African American authors who have an active interest in Stevens' work along with examining the reasons behind this interest, while Galvin focuses on the work of Olive Senior and Terrance Hayes, also intending to find an explanation of Stevens' importance for the poets. Both Steinman and Galvin come to the conclusion that the reason may be the aforementioned self-paradoxicality of Stevens, who managed to combine various opposites in his poetry, and it is his

ambiguity and ambivalence that appeal to contemporary poets of African American origin. Galvin also highlights the significance of the "impulse to revise race-based, capitalist notions of property and subjecthood" (241), due to which they shape a new vision on poetry itself.

The book finishes with Rachel Malkin's "'The California Fruit of the Ideal': Stevens and Robert Hass", which presents a somewhat ambivalent view on the relation between the two, for "thinking about Stevens and Hass involves dynamics of pleasure and solace" and of "doubt and guilt" (247). The essay's ending is rather open, as it asks readers: "In making a case for Stevens' poetry, would we wish to make a case for a certain kind of beauty [...] made possible in and by language? And if so, on what ground(s)?" (257). Such a finale seems to be a perfect fit for this thoughtful and truly enriching collection of articles that do arouse an impressive number of original and engaging discussions.

Although quite a few seminal texts offering a general overview of contemporary American poetry have come off the press recently, such as Christopher MacGowan's *Twentieth-Century American Poetry* (2004), *The Oxford Handbook of Modern and Contemporary American Poetry* (Nelson 2012), *The Cambridge Companion to American Poetry since 1945* (Ashton 2013), to name a few, or works focusing on a less broad subject, for example, David Herd's *John Ashbery and American Poetry* (2000) or Andrew Epstein's *Beautiful Enemies: Friendship and Postwar American Poetry* (2006), Eeckhout and Goldfarb's collection is a valuable contribution to Stevensian studies and generally to the subject of American Poetry. Apart from numerous valid points found throughout the texts of the book, its arguably most important input is the variety of perspectives, which allows the book's readers to travel across countries, epochs, races, and old and new paradigms of literary studies. I believe that *Poetry and Poetics after Wallace Stevens* will be of considerable significance for scholars of war and contemporary poetry as well as for anyone with a genuine interest in literature and the history of thought.

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Notes for contributors

NOTES FOR CONTRIBUTORS

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Citations

Double quotation marks should be used for citations. Single quotes may be used to draw attention to a particular item in the text. Italics are used for foreign words, or for emphasis. References in the text to publications should include the author's surname, the year of publication, and, if necessary, page numbers, as in the following examples:

"…narrative to their function" (Labov and Waletzky 1967: 12).

…following Blakemore (1987: 35),…

…perform a distinctive function in discourse (Blakemore 1987).

…this issue has received a lot of attention by relevance theorists (Blakemore 1987, 1992; Wilson and Sperber 1993).

Should part of the original text be omitted, this will be made clear by inserting […], NOT (…).

Bibliographical references

Bibliographical references should be included in alphabetical order at the end of the manuscript and under the heading WORKS CITED. Authors' full first names should be used unless the authors themselves customarily use only initials. Set the author's last name(s) in small caps. References to two or more works by the same author in a single year should be accompanied by a lower-case a, b, etc. after the year of publication, both in the reference list and in citations in the text. References to books should include the place of publication and the publisher's name, and references to articles in journals should include volume, issue number (if necessary) and page numbers. Titles of books and journals will be written in italics. Titles of articles and of book chapters will be placed in double inverted commas.

Examples:

Monographs:

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FIRST AUTHOR'S SURNAMES(S), First author's first name(s), Second author's first name(s) SECOND AUTHOR'S SURNAME(S) and Third author's first name(s) THIRD AUTHOR'S SURNAME(S). Year. *Title in italics.* Place: Publisher.

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Examples:

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NEALE, Steve. 1992. "The Big Romance or Something Wild? Romantic Comedy Today". *Screen* 33 (3): 284-299.

SAFRAN, Steve. 2007. "E&P: VT paper should be considered for Pulitzer". <http://www.lostremote.com/index.php?tag=virginia-tech>. Accessed July 25, 2008.

"Stars Slate Bush at Relief Event". 2005. BBC News. (September 19). <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/entertainment/4260182.stm>. Accessed February 21, 2010.

TURBIDE, Diane. 1993. "A Literary Trickster: Thomas King Conjures up Comic Worlds". *Maclean's* (3 May): 43-44.

WILLIAMS, Tennessee. 1983. *La gata sobre el tejado de zinc caliente*. Trans. A. Diosdado. Madrid: Ediciones MK.

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* Additional comments should appear in between long dashes: (—) rather than (-); —this is an example—, leaving no spaces in between the dashes and the text within them.
* There should be no full stops after interrogation and exclamation marks.
* Inverted commas should never appear after punctuation marks (eg. "this is correct", but "this isn't.").
* Current (CG Times or Times New Roman) typefaces should be used, and special symbols should be avoided as much as possible.
* "&" should be avoided whenever possible.
* Generally speaking, punctuation and orthography should be coherent (British or American style) all through the article. For example: "emphasise/ recognise" rather than "emphasize/ recognise"; "colour/ colour" rather than "colour/ color".
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